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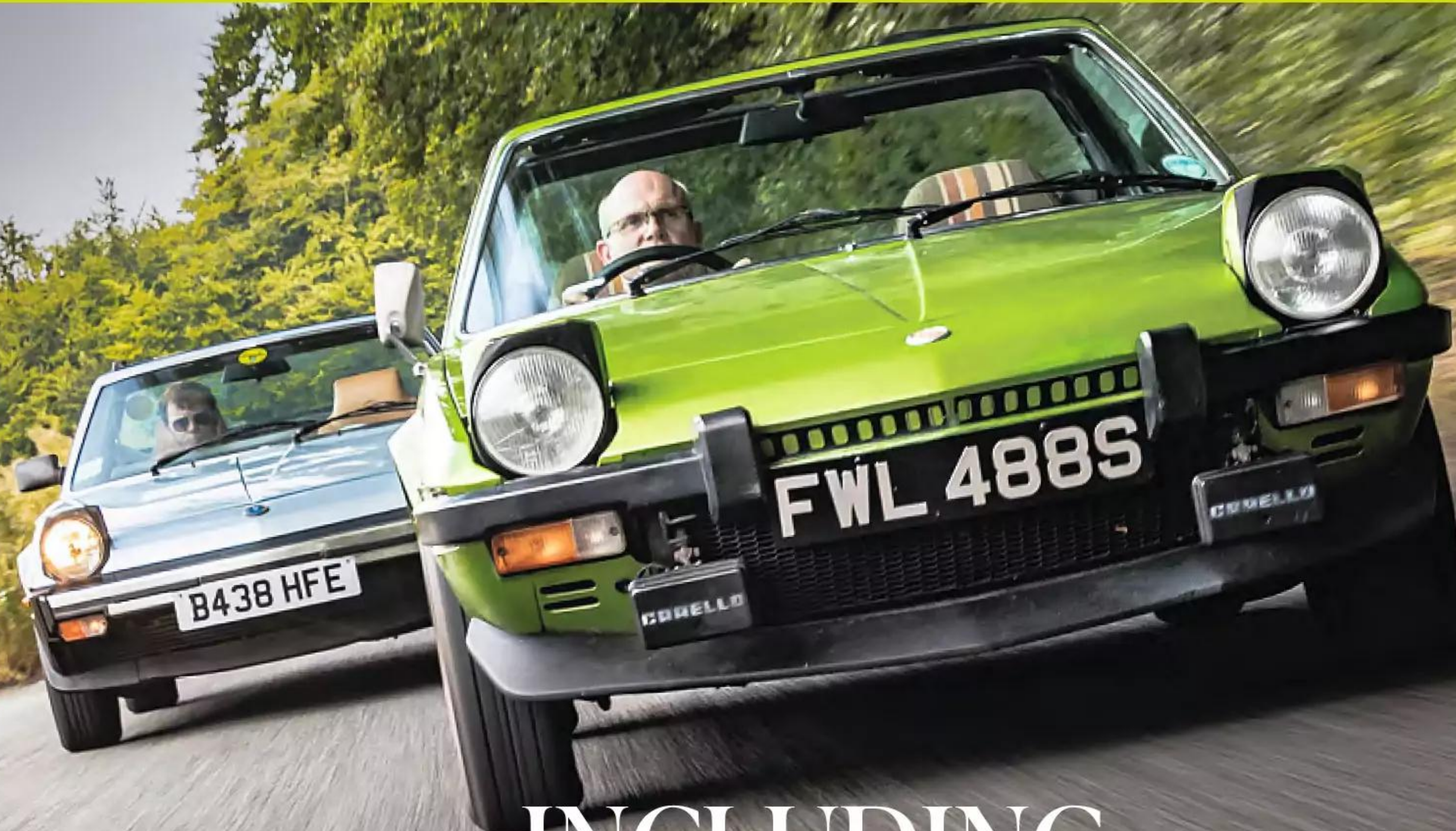


PRESENTS



1970s LEGENDS

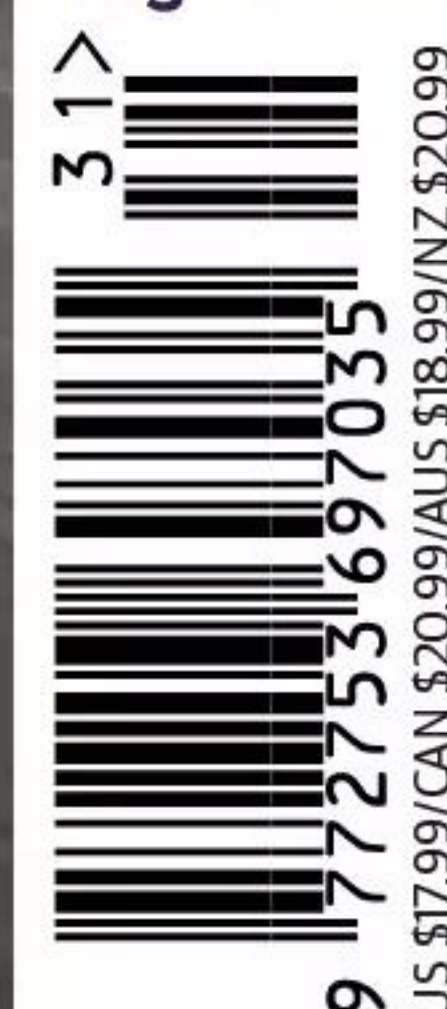
CELEBRATING A DECADE OF STYLE AND SPEED



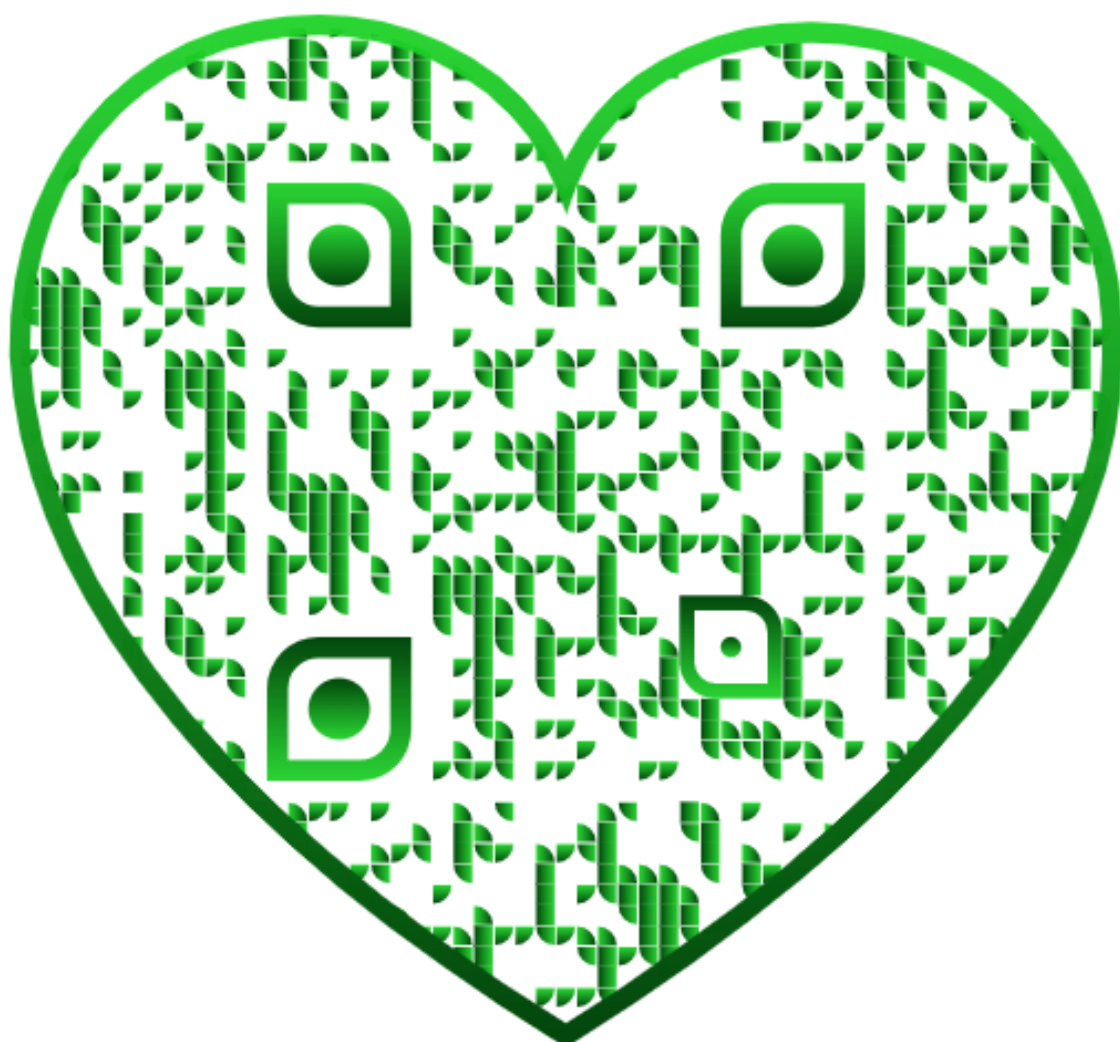
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Welcome

For so long dismissed as the decade that taste forgot, the 1970s has enjoyed a tangible resurgence over recent years. The music, the fashions and particularly the cars have put the jeers of the past behind them, with even the previously derided products of British Leyland now seen as a hot ticket to events where vehicles that were once ordinary are celebrated.

And no wonder: this was a period of outrageous colour schemes and wild styling, creating a wellspring of nostalgia for late Baby Boomers and early Generation X-ers that has driven up values across the board. It was also an era of dramatic change, ushering in new design trends, construction techniques and passenger comforts, along with the first examples of what we now know as 'driver aids', as the last vestiges of post-war austerity were banished and the modern car was born. Just as famous brands were breathing their last, new badges were beginning to dominate, spearheaded by the Japanese success story.

It has been a rich seam of the *Classic & Sports Car* archive to mine as we chose our favourite stories from the decade (turn to p5 to find out when each first appeared) for this 31st edition in our *Legends* series. We have divided the results into five categories – coupés, drop-tops, saloons, supercars and compacts – so don the flares, stick a Deep Purple 8-Track in the stereo and join us for an evocative trip down memory lane.

ALASTAIR CLEMENTS

Editor in chief, *Classic & Sports Car*



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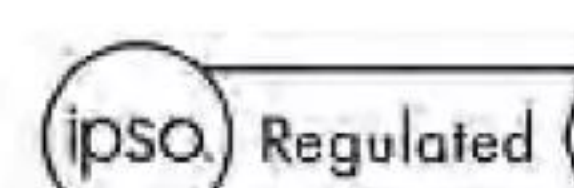
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It pays to be the BOSS

Renowned Ford tuner Jeff Uren's ultimate creation was a 5-litre V8-engined Capri with a wild custom paintjob done for its first owner, Stamos Fafalios

WORDS **JAMES PAGE** PHOTOGRAPHY **MALCOLM GRIFFITHS**





Where do you want to start? With the crazy warpaint, glinting and shimmering in the late-summer sun? Or beneath the bonnet, where – in place of the normal

3-litre V6 powerplant – there rests a 5-litre V8? Either way, it's clear that this is no ordinary Ford Capri. And neither is it some superficial custom effort that is all mouth and no trousers.

Perhaps we'd better rewind to the beginning, because this car did at least begin its life as a standard Capri II. In the summer of 1974, an order was placed within Ford GB for a new Management Role car – a perk of the job that those far enough up the ladder could enjoy for a few months before they ordered a fresh replacement. Over at the Cologne factory, the Capri II 3-litre Ghia automatic was assembled before being shipped to the UK and registered TTW 865N in Chelmsford.

The car was run by a management type for a year or so, then passed into the Ford dealer network. Enter Stamos Fafalios, who worked in London for the family shipping firm. As a car enthusiast, young Fafalios was aware of the conversions carried out by Race Proved Performance and Equipment Ltd based in Hanwell and, as a man of comfortable means, he was able to satisfy his desire for one.

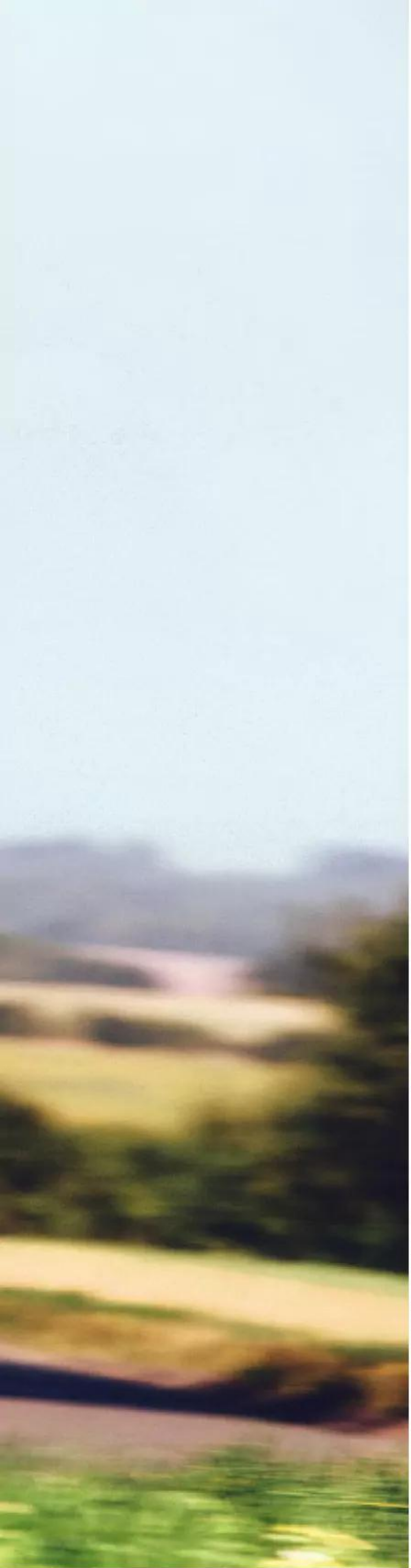
Race Proved had been set up by Jeff Uren in 1967. Uren had a long association with Ford, and he was no mean driver in his time. He and his brother, Douglas, had entered the 1954 Rallye Monte-Carlo in an Armstrong Siddeley before turning to circuit racing. In 1959, he won the British Saloon Car Championship at the wheel of a Ford Zephyr, then went on to score a number of wins aboard various models, and later become competitions manager for the Blue Oval. In 1962, he joined forces with John Willment in Twickenham to manage his eponymous team, which would go on to race everything from the Mk1 Cortina to the GT40 and Cobra, before deciding to go it alone.

Fafalios met up with Uren at Race Proved's Uxbridge Road premises to work out the final specification of his Capri. The conversion that was being offered at the time was named the Stampede, and involved fitting a blueprinted, gas-flowed Boss 302cu in (4949cc) Mustang V8. A 'four on the floor' Toploader gearbox – also from the pony car – was added, but the standard Capri rear axle was retained.

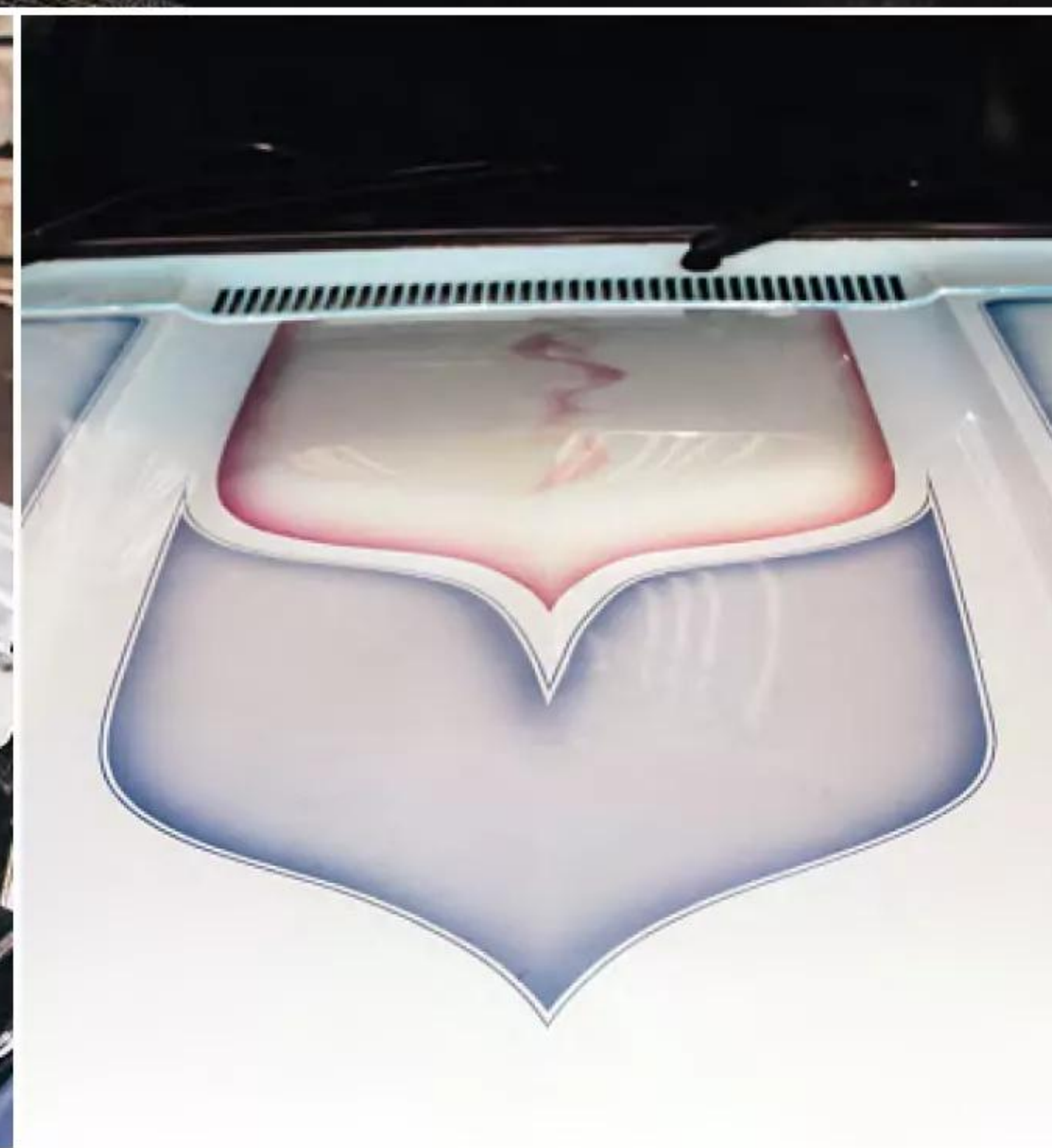
Formula One racer John Miles had helped Uren to perfect the car's set-up, which also comprised stiffer springs all round, Girling dampers, an uprated anti-roll bar and harder bushes. Ventilated discs with four-pot calipers were fitted to the front, while the rear drum brakes received uprated linings. Finally, the 13in Dunlop wheels were swapped for 14in



From top: Uren's conversions were listed as models in their own right; 14in alloys



Clockwise from left: Stampede's acceleration is relentless; gearknob aside, the interior is as it left the works; elaborate bonnet detail; 320bhp Boss powerplant lies where V6 used to be



replacements – which had involved modifying the arches on Mk1 Capris – and they were shod with 60-profile Goodyear tyres. A high-capacity radiator and a Kenlowe fan completed the extensive list of additions.

The cost of all of this work would be £2950 – and that was on top of the £3306 for a new Capri. But Uren had a suggestion: he had access to Ford's low-mileage, nearly new Management Role cars, which would save a little bit of money. The only slight complication was that Fafalios didn't just want any old Stampede. No – he had something else in mind, too, for which a white car would be required.

Every summer, Fafalios spent some time in Greece, and 1975 would be no different. Despite the fact that a suitable Capri had yet to appear from the management pool, he paid Uren the estimated cost of the donor car up front, plus an advance on the work that would need to be carried out, and disappeared off for his sojourn abroad. Finally, on 4 August, TTW 865N came up. It was sold directly to Uren, who had all the major components on hand in West London and immediately got cracking.

The conversion took the best part of three months, after which phase two of the Fafalios plan could swing into action. That autumn, the car went down to Mech Spray in Rochester, Kent. Over the previous six years, the firm had become well known for its custom paintwork, winning numerous awards. Fafalios wanted

something particularly striking for the Capri. Working over a white base, Mech Spray applied a 'frosted-grape pearl' effect and then patterns in yellow and blue. A layer of sparkling Mirra Flake was topped with coat after coat of lacquer. The whole thing cost an extra £215, including a set of bespoke mudflaps.

After all that cosmetic attention, you might be thinking that the car was used sparingly and carefully thereafter. Not a bit of it. Uren took Fafalios down to Goodwood for a track test, where the Capri showed an indicated 140mph.

The car returned to Mech Spray in 1976 to have cavity wax and underseal applied, and Fafalios even used it for his summer break to Greece. The ferry sticker is still in the rear window to this day, and the continental-spec headlamp stickers are in place, too. By August 1978, the mileage was recorded at 20,480.

Shortly after that, however, the Capri went into its first – and so far longest – period of hibernation. Fafalios held on to the car, and in 2005 it was recommissioned by Mike Brown, who was a former mechanic for Uren. New pistons were sourced in the United States, the internal components were balanced, and the Holley carburettor was rebuilt. The brakes were serviced, and new tyres fitted.

The Capri was MoT tested in September 2008, when the mileage crept up a little further to 21,245, but following Brown's retirement the car was put back into storage. Fafalios finally

agreed to sell it in autumn 2013, and a few months later the Stampede appeared in Bonhams' Oxford Banbury Run auction.

Roland Drew and Robin Henderson were at the sale purely because they also have an interest in old motorbikes, but, after not buying anything with two wheels, they were struck by the wild Ford. It hadn't sold when first offered to the room, but a post-event deal was done.

"Our biggest concern," recalls Robin, "was that someone else would buy the Capri and respray it. To be honest, my motivation was saving that paintwork."

Their intention was never to hold on to the car – Aston Martin enthusiast Robin won't drive it for fear of falling in love with it and changing his mind about selling – but once they had got it home, they started fettling certain areas in preparation for passing it on to a suitable custodian. The Ford ran side-exit exhausts for a while, which had necessitated modifications to the sills. Those alterations needed tidying now that it was back on standard pipes. Best of all, though, it has been back to Mech Spray – which is still very much in business – to have the paint refreshed.

Roland also began to look more deeply into the car's history. He estimates that only eight Stampedes were built, and has so far accounted for five of them. The model's press release features a photograph of a Mk1 with a Sheffield (EYM) registration. *Motor* magazine road-



Stampede is remarkably easy to drive. Above: discreet twin pipes. Right: solid black along the lower edge helps disguise the car's depth



tested another Mk1 – registered NYE 9L – in April 1974, and a third car was advertised by Uren himself in the mid-1980s. Bizarrely, it is thought that a fourth made its way to Jamaica, and the fifth is the Fafalios Mk2. If anyone knows any more about the short production run, Roland would be all ears.

It's a sign of the quality of Uren's conversions that he was included in *What Car?* as a car manufacturer in his own right. Positioned just above Vanden Plas and Vauxhall in the listings, the details for each model – from Savage to Stampede – are shown, and the list price for the latter is quoted as £5000, roughly the same as a Daimler Double-Six. An E-type V12 was 'only' £4111, but a Jensen Interceptor would have set you back £7754, an Aston Martin V8 £9593.

If you think that is rarefied company for a car that is, in essence, a Ford Capri, consider the performance figures achieved by *Motor*. The Stampede went from 0-60mph in 5.8 secs – exactly the same as the time posted by the Ferrari 365GTB/4 Daytona, and 0.6 secs faster than the E-type. It was still hanging on to the Ferrari's coat-tails at 100mph (13.8 secs against 13 secs), by which time the Jaguar had been left well behind. The Stampede was considerably faster than both when timed from 50-70mph in top, thanks mostly to its short gearing of 22.2mph per 1000rpm.

'The acceleration is really quite exciting,' commented the *Motor* road-tester with

considerable understatement. The magazine also raved about the amount of grip on offer, as well as the roadholding – testament to the quality of Uren's development work.

Even a standard Capri II shouts '1970s!' as loudly as a pair of platform shoes, but the effect is considerably enhanced by the glam-spec makeover. As was generally the case with Uren's cars, it effectively hides its mechanical potency, with the occasional 'Boss' badge and the twin-pipe 2in exhausts subtly hinting at what lies beneath. To begin with at least, your

'This is no lazy boat anchor that's out of ideas by 4000 revs: it spins happily to 7000rpm'

attention is diverted by the craftsmanship that went into Mech Spray's wild paintjob.

The full effect only strikes you when the sun comes out, at which point the Capri starts to sparkle and shimmer thanks to the Mirra Flake particles. The colours have faded slightly over the years, but the faint swirls are still perfectly visible, and the harder you look, the more detail you uncover. From 10 paces, only the blue of the lines 'framing' the panels truly



Fafalios' car apparently served as a guinea pig for techniques that Mech Spray used on the 'French Connection' Mustang project – even the mirrors received the custom treatment



stands out from the side, but the artistry is best appreciated up close. It contrasts completely with the solid black applied to the lower edges, and which runs from the back all the way up to the front chin spoiler, which was grafted in by Grand Prix Metalcraft.

Inside, it is pretty much bog-standard Capri, which at least gives your eyes a bit of a rest. The swathes of black are almost therapeutic. To drive, however, it is emphatically not a bog-standard Capri. The clutch is incredibly heavy, as is the steering, but anything else would be a slight disappointment and not at all in keeping with the car's character.

It is a demeanour that is dominated by the Boss V8 engine. Weighty controls aside, the Stampede is not a particularly difficult thing to drive. It's actually quite docile until you open the throttle. The remarkable thing is not the way in which the car immediately surges forward – you would expect a 5-litre V8 to push out plenty of torque – it is the way that the power just keeps on coming. This is no lazy, strangled American boat-anchor of a unit that is all out of ideas by 4000rpm. The rev counter reads to 6000rpm, and the engine will happily spin beyond that to 7000rpm.

By that point, Uren's creation is simply thundering down the road. There's nothing neck-snapping about its acceleration, but you do have the sense that you are riding a solid wave of momentum. The brakes seem a little

unwilling to bring things back to earth, but the handling is surprisingly user-friendly. Uren's work involved strengthening certain areas of the monocoque and, in tandem with the suspension upgrades, you can feel the benefit. Any understeer can quickly be dealt with via the 320bhp being delivered to the rear wheels.

Only the Toploader gearbox needs a degree of concentration, the four-speeder refusing to give you much in the way of feedback as you move the lever – 'Is that first or third? Second or reverse?' As long as you are accurate and decisive, however, you shouldn't make any expensive mistakes.

It's an intriguing car, this, for many reasons. If Fafalios hadn't held on to it for so long, there seems little doubt that a subsequent owner would have resprayed it at some point. As it is, however, that ethereal Marc Bolan-esque paint – all glitter and wisps of colour – contrasts sharply with the huge reserves of beefcake power from the Mustang engine.

The Uren conversion on its own would have made the Capri Stampede special – there is something very appealing about a mainstream model being turned into such a potent Q-car – but the fact that it was personalised so distinctively in period by a young man who wanted something different gives it even more character. It has come a long way since that manager in Essex filled in a form and decided to replace their company car. 

UREN'S TRIBAL GATHERING

During the seven years in which Race Proved offered Ford conversions, it sold more than 1500 cars. Perhaps the most well known was the V6-engined Savage, which was based on the MkII (below), III and IV Cortina, while the Cheetah was a 2.5-litre version of the same. The MkI Escort also received the Uren treatment via the V6 Apache and Pinto-engined Navajo, which added £520 to the cost of a standard Sport, but cut the 0-60mph time from 13.1 secs to 8.9 secs.

The Granada was modified in the shape of the Seneca, which could muster up to 220bhp from its V6; Race Proved even did a 3-litre Transit called the Easypower. The Stampede wasn't the only Capri that you could order, either – Uren also offered a 3-litre version called the Commanche.

Most of Uren's models were available in various trim/power levels. Commanches ranged from the 169bhp 170GT to 218bhp Pi GXL, while the Navajo, Cheetah and Savage could be specified as estates.



DRIVING A WEDGE INTO THE STATUS QUO

Can the Elite, the most practical Lotus of all, match up to the Mercedes-Benz W123 and Lancia Gamma, two of the most glamorous 1970s coupés?

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES MANN**

Having the budget to shop for a luxury coupé in the late 1970s and early '80s was a nice problem. The post-Fuel Crisis doom-mongers had been proved wrong: amid all of the rational hatchbacks, the miserable

family saloons and the promise of a future populated by hideous safety cars with monstrous rubber bumpers, there was still a place for plush individualism. It was found in expensive coupés that were better-looking, less practical and that little bit rarer than their four-door siblings. The premium coupé encapsulated a kind of restrained suburban decadence, a car for the gravel drives of the Home Counties – or a particularly smug district of Stuttgart or Munich – where the dinner-party conversation flitted between the stock market, house prices and golf.

Even more interesting, when you look closely at this trio, was the variety of solutions on offer to the problem of packaging four luxurious seats in a distinctive four-cylinder, two-door grand touring car of reasonable overall dimensions and socially acceptable levels of thirst. Cars in which packaging and interior space were subordinate to an elegance of proportion that put an emphasis firmly on a smoothly compact roofline.

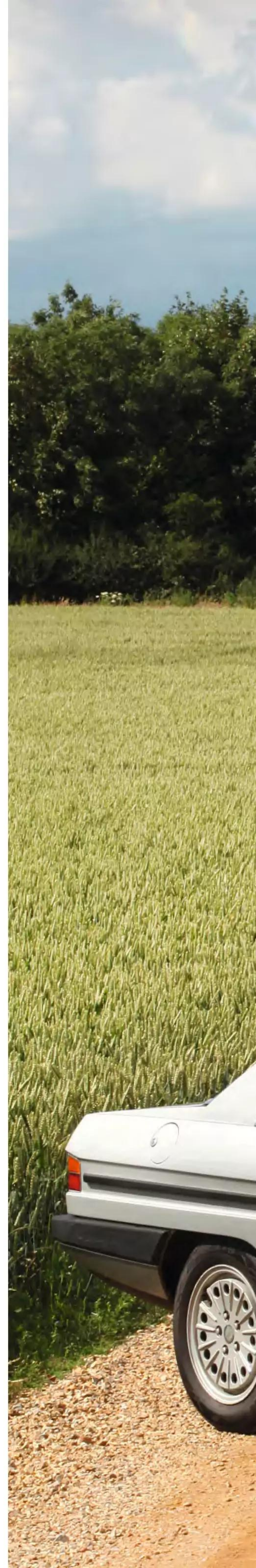
And if there was no rational argument that could be made for a Lancia Gamma Coupé, a Mercedes-Benz 230CE or a Lotus Elite, then who cared? These cars – then, as now – are rarely bought for rational reasons. The vain

secret that lurks behind every coupé is that people like them simply because they look nice and because they feel special to be aboard. In the 1970s and '80s, these were the two-doors of the establishment; people who had achieved a comfortable position in life and wanted a car that reflected their good taste and high degree of disposable income.

Here we have a face-off between a pair of saloon-based coupés from two of the oldest and most respected marques in Europe, plus an upstart Briton that was developed from a tradition of specialist sports cars into a vehicle with more mainstream appeal. As we shall discover, there are advantages and limitations to both of these approaches.

The Germans – and Mercedes-Benz in particular – had been playing the coupé game for years. The 230CE was probably the best all-rounder in the company's well-loved range of W123-based two-doors. It was part of a tradition that stretched back to the early '60s and the W111 coupés – cars that, to some extent, were a European take on the large American pillarless hardtops of the time. Mercedes aimed the C and CE models at owners without demanding families (with children still small enough to fit in the rear), or retired couples who could afford the luxury of a highly equipped vehicle with (usually) a larger engine and for whom the inconvenience of only two doors was not a concern.

The 1977-'85 W123 coupés were a direct replacement for the W115 'Stroke 8' two-doors of the 1968 generation. Whereas the previous car shared its wheelbase with the W114/W115





saloon, the new model was 4in shorter between the axles than the four-door, and the interplay between the 2in-lower roof plus the sharply raked windscreen and the rear window gave the car a more squat look. Naturally, space in the rear was tighter than in the saloon, but it was still good for a two-door car. Those large doors opened to reveal a pillarless design that required a stiffer body with strengthening in the rear quarters.

Conventionally yet meticulously engineered, the fuel-injected, four-cylinder 230CE was only marginally less silky and potent than the flagship 280, but a vast improvement over the single-carburettor 230C it replaced. Mercedes placed a huge premium on the prettier coupé body and buyers were more than happy to pay it, waiting for up to two years for the privilege.

Not so the Lancia Gamma Coupé, launched in 1976. Such was this model's reputation for mechanical self-destruction that only a few brave souls could be persuaded to part with the £9185 Lancia demanded for the car. Not even an extensively improved 1980 Series 2 (as here) gave buyers the confidence to give this enigmatic misfit a chance. Those who did were usually entranced by its elegance – one of Pininfarina's best efforts of the time – and handling, which was amazingly neutral for a front-wheel-drive car with a 2.5-litre engine sited well forward of the axle line.

And this was no ordinary engine, but a lightweight flat-four inspired by the boxer units that had powered a generation of Flavias and 2000s for 15 years. High-revving yet in a modest state of tune, the Gamma boasted the largest-capacity four-cylinder petrol engine of any European passenger car. It was a specification that pleased Lancia fans, but frustrated owners with its head-gasket problems and propensity for stripping the teeth of its cambelt when the steering was on full lock with a cold engine at tickover. Some genius had thought it a clever idea to run the camshaft and power-steering pump drives off the same belt, but the resulting mechanical carnage (usually smashed valves) trashed the Gamma's commercial reputation before this flagship of the Fiat/Lancia range had really got into its stride.

In many ways, the 1974 Elite was the most ambitious Lotus road car since the original Type 14 Elite of 1957 – if you allow yourself a rather elastic definition of the term. After all, it was all new and the company's first full four-seater. Marque founder Colin Chapman had begun scheming the car in the late '60s and its specification was largely frozen by 1972, but the Elite's launch was delayed by the miners' strike and the three-day week. With its low-drag shape (it had the best coefficient of any 1974 production car) and the modest fuel demands of its 16-valve, double-overhead-cam 2-litre

LOTUS ELITE S2 2.2

Sold/number built 1980-'82/132

Construction steel backbone chassis, glassfibre body

Engine all-alloy, dohc 2174cc slant-four, twin Dell'Orto DHLA 45E carburettors

Max power 160bhp @ 6500rpm

Max torque 160lb ft @ 5000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** trailing arms, transverse links, fixed-length driveshafts; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 14ft 6in (4420mm)

Width 5ft 1½in (1652mm)

Height 3ft 1½in (953mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 1¾in (2484mm)

Weight 2645lb (1120kg)

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 130mph **Mpg** 23

Price new £16,433

'The Elite is a rare thing compared to the Lancia and Mercedes, and looks impossibly low-slung beside them'





Clockwise from above:
rubbing strip conceals join
between top and bottom
halves; slant-four appeared
first in the Jensen-Healey;
leather in ex-Chapman car



Contradictions: Germany,
England and Italy; straight,
slant and flat 'fours'; steel
three-box monocoques
versus a glassfibre wedge
with a separate chassis

engine, the Elite was heralded as the efficient and rational exotic of the future.

Codenamed M50, this dramatically wedge-shaped, close-coupled four-seater was a bold move upmarket. It was bigger, safer, more luxurious and more refined than its forebears, yet was carefully conceived not to forgo the traditional Lotus driver appeal. The Oliver Winterbottom-styled glassfibre body – sitting on a proven backbone chassis – was made by the new VARI (vacuum-assisted resin infusion) process, injection-moulded in two halves. It was nothing new in terms of concept, but a philosophical revolution for Hethel in that it represented an attempt to build fewer cars with higher profit margins.

The first generation of Elites came in 501, 502, 503 and 504 forms, with progressively higher luxury specification but always the same Type 907 2-litre slant-four engine – first seen in the Jensen-Healey – matched to a five-speed gearbox with Austin Maxi internals. Actually, the 504 version was an automatic – another first for Lotus.

The improved Series 2 Elite (and the Éclat, its fastback running mate) landed in 1980. A longer-stroke 2174cc engine answered those critics who said that the 2-litre lacked torque, and a Getrag five speed 'box was a worthwhile

improvement, but the focus of interest at Lotus had moved on to the Esprit and nobody much minded when the Elite petered out in late 1982.

That short production run makes the Series 2 a rare car, with just 132 built. Even if you include Éclats and all the 2-litre cars, the total figure doesn't get much above 4000 units in eight years, so compared to the Lancia and the Mercedes-Benz this beautifully preserved S2 Elite 2.2, once the road car of Chapman himself, is a rare thing.

The shape still looks futuristic and is enjoying a resurgence of popularity after decades in the fashion doldrums. It isn't beautiful, just bold and assertive where its Éclat and Excel offspring look apologetic and slightly anodyne. With that chopped-off tail and blade-like nose, it is a shape you would not have been surprised to see being driven by Commander Straker in *UFO*.

It looks impossibly low-slung beside the others here and upstages them on the inside in a frenzy of soft, aromatic red leather (although both the Gamma and the 230CE also offered a hide option) and boxy dash structure that appears to groan with switches, instruments and vents. With deep bucket seats to get the bottom low and the knees high, those in the rear can enjoy decent levels of long-distance comfort, particularly with a cool breeze from the air-con in this high-specification car. A glass panel separates the rear seats from the modestly sized boot and the (very real)

possibility of petrol fumes. Views ahead are dramatic down the tapering nose, but compromised to the rear by the thick C-pillar.

With a carburettor choke for each cylinder, the Lotus engine has a slightly primitive sound and feel to it for a car that aspires to such sophistication. It delivers the goods, though, whether you are winding it out in the intermediate gears or making briskly docile progress in fourth and top. It smooths out and is especially strong from 3000rpm, feeling intuitive straight away with light, precise gearchanges and a clutch that is heavy but with a well-defined bite.

That the Elite handles brilliantly almost goes without saying. It feels balanced, flat and has lots and lots of cornering power whether the road be flat or bumpy, so that going quickly feels more than just effortless: it is actually relaxing. The only mildly weak link is the powered steering, which I had expected to be a shade quicker to respond. The assistance 'hunts' a little somehow, so that the effort required is not always consistent – but overall it is still pretty good.

Even today the Elite would be considered quite quick, and neither the Gamma nor the Mercedes can catch it in a straight line or around corners, although the Lancia comes close. The Italian has superbly weighted and accurate power steering – by far the best of the three – and, despite being front-drive, delays the onset of understeer to a point you would rarely reach on the road. It isn't exactly slow, either. With five nicely stacked manual ratios in a slightly rubbery gearbox, the Lancia feels definitively livelier than the Benz, with bags of torque and an endearing willingness to rev.

Yet this giant boxer engine, visually messy under the bonnet, is curiously unappealing and lumpy-sounding at low speeds. You can see it at once in the way the tailpipe shudders and this low-mileage car, freshly out of a Scottish Lancia collection, sounds better than most. Having owned 15 Gammas now – and learnt my lesson – I'm in a position to comment.

From the inside, it hardly helps that the ugly, looming dashboard shakes and rattles seemingly in sympathy with the engine. Cruising along in fifth gear in relative quiet, however, you begin to see the point. The flat-four becomes silken and, when you squeeze the throttle, there's torque to spare for bursts of acceleration beyond three figures.

Were it not for that rather undistinguished dashboard, the Gamma would be a nice place to be. The dark blue 'L-cloth' is slightly cheesy, but cosy, and the elegant simplicity of the seat design back and front is everything you would expect from Carrozzeria Pininfarina, which built and trimmed the Coupés. That said, the seat feels low in relation to the dashboard and the driving position is odd in some hard-to-define way, almost as if the car was schemed out before anyone had decided where its occupants were going to sit.

If the Mercedes seems more ordinary, that is probably just because it is more familiar. Opening the long, heavy, frameless doors instantly makes the coupé experience feel special and the low roof and shorter wheelbase give the cabin an intimate atmosphere, although there is room in the rear for grown-ups on shorter trips. There's a secret cubbyhole



Gamma offers neutral handling, despite the forward-mounted engine



Top: Gamma Coupé is a Pininfarina classic of its time. Above: injected flat-four produces 140bhp

LANCIA GAMMA COUPÉ 2500IE

Sold/number built 1976-'84/6789

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 2484cc flat-four, Bosch fuel injection

Max power 140bhp @ 5400rpm

Max torque 153lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** struts, transverse links, coil springs, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 14ft 8in (4470mm)

Width 5ft 8in (1727mm)

Height 4ft 5in (1346mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4½in (2555mm)

Weight 2844lb (1290kg)

0-60mph 9 secs

Top speed 122mph **Mpg** 23

Price new £9185



'L-cloth' trim, the height of late-'70s automotive fashion



Supportive seats and clear dashboard are shared with the rest of the W123 range



MERCEDES-BENZ 230CE

Sold/number built 1977-'85/187,367
(all W123 CE variants)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-iron, sohc 2299cc 'four', Bosch K-Jetronic mechanical fuel injection

Max power 136bhp @ 5100rpm

Max torque 148lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission four-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones **rear** semi-trailing arms; coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 3in (4655mm)

Width 5ft 4½in (1740mm)

Height 4ft 5¾in (1368mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 11in (2715mm)

Weight 2844lb (1290kg)

0-60mph 11.5 secs

Top speed 112mph **Mpg** 21

Price new £12,000

From top: Merc's handling is benign; 2.3-litre 'four' is torquey and more frugal than 280 'six'; elegant pillarless style

between the seats and, as in the saloon, the rear parcel shelf features a first-aid kit.

On the move, the 230CE feels pleasantly airy and, with the windows lowered and the sunroof open, who would not be impressed by the way the pillarless windows give an unimpeded view of the landscape flashing by? The dashboard is as solid and well conceived as the Gamma's is brittle and random, with swathes of quality plastic relieved by that slightly unconvincing Germanic wood trim and the controls, including the nine-function column stalk, shared with other W123s.

Apart from feeling slightly cosier, the 230CE drives exactly like a 230E. Undemanding, smooth and slightly cut off from the world around, it goes about its business with a pedestrian exhaust note and perfectly deployed changes from the auto 'box that was almost invariably the choice of coupé buyers.

There is nothing wrong with the way the Mercedes handles – it tends always towards safe, mild understeer – but it does feel several shades more cumbersome than the other two. That's mainly because the huge wheel tends to accentuate a deadness in the steering around the straight-ahead. So, where the Lotus offers excitement and the Gamma lusty eccentricity, the Mercedes performs with a tediously brisk efficiency that will never set your heart racing. The performance is there, with fuel injection and nearly 140bhp from the M102 overhead-cam unit, but you are rarely encouraged to go looking for it. The joy of the W123 is in its refinement and solidity, the sense that it will just keep on going with minimal attention.

For those who take only a passing interest in cars, it is a relaxing, undemanding vehicle. For those who enjoy cars and driving for their own sake, it is an ever so slightly boring one and, although I know that the CE is the best product here in terms of durability and utility, I can't help being drawn to the stronger characters of the Lancia and the Lotus, however flawed they may be in detail. Much as I still love the look of the Gamma, however, the surprise result is that I would probably settle for the Elite. 

Thanks to Lotus owner Leigh Greenham; Lancia and Mercedes-Benz owner Jason Yorke-Edgell





The story of the Marcos Mantis, the wacky four-seater that was wrongly blamed for the firm's demise

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE** PHOTOGRAPHY **MALCOLM GRIFFITHS**

It's hard to look at, but even harder to look away from. Anchored in the faultline between circumstance and calamity, the story of the Mantis is imbued with high hopes and dashed dreams. But then this is a Marcos: it goes with the territory. If legend is to be believed, this idiosyncratic vision of the future helped to pauperise the marque first time around, its 'house of mirrors' styling prompting small children to cry and causing a mass milk-curdling incident on its release at the 1970 Earls Court Motor Show. You know the yarn by rote: it was a disaster.

Except not all of this is true. Point of view is the crux. Whatever you think of the styling, the Mantis is striking, and the sole Marcos excursion into the four-seater market still displays real polish for its intended purpose. It's just that so few punters ever got to find that out. Only 32 cars were made during an 11-month production run, yet the kicking that has been meted out to it ever since is at odds with the model's reception.

"I know that when we launched the car, Colin Chapman said to [marque founder] Jem Marsh 'How did you get this done so quickly? You're on to something here'," recalls Mantis co-creator Brian Cunnington. And that was a full four years before Lotus released the Type 75 Elite, the self-same car this former Hawker Aircraft engineer had project-managed during its embryonic stages. But unlike the complex Hethel device, the Mantis went from

idea to reality in less than a year. What's more, when it did break cover, it was showered with praise. *Autosport* dubbed it: 'Not just a pretty face. Indeed, it repays the closest attention as it has so many practical details.' *Autocar*, meanwhile, talked of the new car's 'exciting looks', the fastback rear three-quarter view 'being reminiscent of the Aston Martin DB6'. It's all about perception versus reality.



"Jem and I had often talked about doing a car with four seats," says co-conspirator Dennis Adams, whose earlier 1800 coupé design had caused a furore when it was announced in 1964. "Initially we looked at simply stretching an 1800, but it would have looked awful. At that time – this would be the late 1960s – I drew an outline for a compact two-plus-two with pop-up headlights and a hatchback, but by then I'd left Marcos and was working [with brother Peter] on my own cars – the Probe series."

It was at this juncture that the Mantis took a turn for the leftfield, if only visually. Brian, whose CV also includes the Lotus Elan +2, conceived a simple-to-fabricate square-section, steel-tube chassis with a central backbone. The front end was suspended by a Triumph GT6 set-up (with coil springs made in-house), with the same car also supplying the rack-and-pinion steering. Ford's Capri donated its live rear end, here located on an A-bracket, along with the front disc and rear drum brakes. "Initially we were going to use the 3-litre Ford V6," explains Brian. "The problem we had with Ford was the same one I'd encountered while at Lotus: you would have a good working relationship and then there would be a change of management, and with it came a 'new broom' mentality. At Lotus, they stopped supplying us with gearboxes for a while, and I'd looked to Standard-Triumph for a replacement. When I was doing the Mantis prototype, I went back and managed to wangle two free engines."

Sited well back in the frame, and supplied in 150bhp TR6 trim, this delicious straight-six came with an overdrive four-speed gearbox. A Borg-Warner 35 automatic was promised as an option, but nobody ever stumped up for one. Then came the tricky bit – the styling. "I will be honest with you, I've always been very dismissive of the Mantis," laughs Dennis. "Every once in a while I'd be asked about the car, and I'd go out of my way to distance myself from it. I once said something along the lines of, 'All the bits you like are mine, the rest are



Ultra-'70s cloth is a later retrim (it was originally black vinyl); Mountney steering wheel is a later fitting, too, but the Smiths instruments are original. Just 10 cars are thought to survive



Jem Marsh tests Ford-engined chassis

MARCOS MANTIS

Sold/number built 1970-'71/32

Construction steel chassis, glassfibre body moulded in six pieces and bonded to frame

Engine all-iron, ohv 2498cc straight-six, Lucas mechanical fuel injection

Max power 150bhp @ 5700rpm

Max torque 158lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, overdrive on top three gears, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, A-bracket, trailing arms; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Length 15ft 6¾in (4743mm)

Width 5ft 11in (1803mm)

Height 3ft 10in (1168mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 6in (2591mm)

Weight 3200lb (1450kg)

0-60mph 9 secs

Top speed 125mph **Mpg** 22

Price new £2550

Brian's,' and that has haunted me ever since; I regret saying that. People ask me what planet I was on when I designed the Mantis, and I would argue that *this* car is from Earth and mine was from way up there. Mine was more radical: I wanted the doors to pivot vertically like the Lamborghini Countach's did later on. Well, Brian had his own views on what would work, and I got a bit pissed off about it. I didn't much like the Mantis – the manhole cover on the bonnet, the headlight fairings. Jem didn't want to go to the trouble and expense of reinforcing the roof, so the hatchback had to go: Brian moved the rear window forward and created a boot. I was getting paid, so in the end I just said 'yes' to everything and disclaimed everything later."

Brian counters: "I had always got on well with Dennis, but I was just handed a model and had to make it into something. If I had gone with his design, there would have been no space in the back as long as you had legs and no room for the engine *and* the windscreen. When we started on the car [codename M70], I think Jem and Dennis were crossing swords and I just got on with it."

The definitive production version of the car took its bow on the *Daily Telegraph* stand at Earls Court and all looked rosy, if only initially. With a 1970 launch price of £2550, the Mantis wasn't cheap, yet, by the time production started early the following year, Marcos was

making around three cars a month. A move to a new, purpose-built factory on the West Wilts Trading Estate disrupted the flow for a while, but worse was to come: some 27 Marcos coupés were impounded in the USA in the belief that they didn't conform to the country's emission regulations (they did), and the resulting lack of revenue irrevocably damaged the firm. It went under at the end of 1971. But, while Marcos wouldn't stay dead, the Mantis was never reanimated and continues to be erroneously blamed for the marque's early-'70s tumble.

Nowadays, this remarkable machine is a real curio. Yet, while you can dismiss the Mantis, you sure as heck can't miss one. Photographs really don't lend a sense of scale. The family Marcos is big: some 7in wider than an E-type, yet it stands only 46in high. It is strangely captivating, too, like some sort of automotive equivalent of a duck-billed platypus – a genetic mash-up, where seemingly disparate elements coalesce into a funky whole. That's 'funky' in the pejorative sense, so 'peculiar' rather than 'groovy'. While it remains a lightning-rod for beauty arbiters, the Mantis has presence and attracts (welcome) attention like few more mainstream classics.

See past the polarising silhouette and you're in for a treat. Inside, it's an honest-to-goodness four-seater: the amount of room for front and rear occupants is astounding. There's oodles of space, and even if this car's brown-and-oatmeal



It's a proper four-seater, with a roomy rear cabin



Mantis is hefty at 1450kg, yet it feels lively with 150bhp Triumph motor





From top: stylist Adams envisaged pop-up lights, scissor doors and a hatch; hints of Aston DB6 in Kamm tail; standard-fitment alloys

fabric trim isn't to all tastes (it was originally black vinyl), it is in keeping with the era. As with any Marcos, you sit low, raked back in true racer style rather than a gentleman's express. The big centre console, built around the central chassis member, doesn't overly encroach, the faux timber and rocker switches being typical of the period. It's super-comfortable, and there are few of the ergonomic quirks that often blight low-volume cars.

That choice of engine, though, is inspired. Triumph's big 'six' offers a smooth power delivery and a suitably stirring soundtrack. Period tests quoted 0-60mph in 9 secs, which seems plausible. The gearchange is a mite notchy, with the stubby lever set high in the console, yet the hydraulic clutch is effortlessly light. What impresses most is the torque spread. There's never any hesitancy, just great waftability. Marcos claimed a drag coefficient of 0.35, which was impressive for its day (the Ford Sierra only managed 0.34Cd a decade later). In overdrive top at 60mph, and geared for 27mph per 1000rpm, it is unstressed and in its element. There's much to like here.

This being a Marcos, it also handles very well. The steering is especially accurate and communicative. You can punt the Mantis into a sequence of testing switchbacks, and, while there is a fair degree of body roll, it never threatens to spill over. It's near-neutral, with dead-on 50% front, 50% rear weight distribution. The dampers on this example are a little worn, but the ride is astonishing: supple and with no shudders through the structure, even over sharp speed bumps.

So the Mantis deserves to come in from the cold, then? The torch-carrying starts here. "I'd like to own one before I get too old," admits Brian. "If I have any regrets it's that I painted the bumpers and headlight pods in black rather than body colour, but that's about it. There was a lot of clever stuff on the Mantis: the flush-fitting doorhandles and windows – as flush as any can be with rubber grommets."

Dennis is less effusive, but admits: "There wasn't much passion on my part when we were doing the Mantis. I remember them asking me how to do the back panel, which was flat across its width. I told them to hollow it out, but honestly I couldn't have cared less. There was a period during which whenever a journalist asked me how my vision for the car differed from the eventual Mantis, I would do my act. I didn't have any renderings left so I would just draw it on the spot.

"Of course, over the years these drawings got wilder and wilder, more fiendish. What really did it for me was when [Marcos Owners' Club founder] Colin Feyerabend got Brian and me together to do a story on who did what. I was shocked when Brian was able to produce the original scale model: I'd never ever laid eyes on it before. It had been done by my modelmaker Alan Osbaldeston, though, and that was what Brian had worked from. It looked horrible! Having seen it, I have to say he did a great job: it could have looked a lot, *lot* worse!" 

Thanks to Redline Sportscars (redlinesportscars.com). This story was published in 2008; Brian Cunningham passed away in 2017, and Dennis Adams in 2024





Vehicles from the land of the rising sun play a major role in the modern modified-car world, with more recent favourites being early 1990s coupés such as the Nissan 300ZX, Toyota Supra and the Mazda RX-7 Series 3. In the genre's most famous film to date, *The Fast and the Furious*, released in 2001, Japanese cars dominate the full-throttle street-racing action – against a nod to the past in the form of a lone Dodge Charger. The film was such a success

at the box office that a popular sequel was released in 2003, *2 Fast 2 Furious*.

All of these modern performance machines have been developed by their manufacturers through different models since their inception in the 1970s. But their three earliest versions had made the motoring world take the Japanese car industry seriously – the Datsun 240Z, the Toyota Celica GT2000 and the Mazda RX-7 Series 1. Each caused a real stir when released on to the market, with the trio appearing over a period of almost a decade, and today they remain icons of classic motoring.

Fans of Japanese sports cars have a lot to thank the Datsun 240Z for because it set the blueprint for success, especially in the USA. When it was introduced there late in 1969 it offered a great package: a fantastic-looking car, with the performance to match, at a bargain price of just \$3500. Well-established design cues meant the shape was popular: a slight echo of Jaguar's E-type when viewed from the front, and the roofline is very Porsche 911. The cabin equipment levels are high and the driving position is low but comfortable thanks to the bucket seats, all of which enhances the

Early risers

These three diverse sports coupés made the world take the Japanese motor industry seriously, but which is best: Datsun 240Z, Mazda RX-7 or Toyota Celica GT2000?

WORDS DALE SPILLER PHOTOGRAPHY TONY BAKER



sporty feel. The instrument panel is modern and plain, with a rev counter and speedometer set in deep nacelles in the heavily grained black vinyl dashboard. Sitting facing the standard wood-rimmed steering wheel, you have a great vista of the road ahead, though with no side mirrors there is not such a great view of what is behind, but the lack of adornment helps to emphasise the 240Z's curves.

Under the long, long bonnet lurks a 2392cc single-overhead cam straight six with twin SU-style carburettors, producing 151bhp at 5600rpm – not only impressive with its figures,

but it also sounds great. The roaring six-pot engine evolved from the four-cylinder unit found in the Datsun Bluebird saloon. The 240Z will reach 60mph from rest in just 8 secs and power on to a top speed of 125mph – figures that are not bad for a modern car, let alone one dating from the dawn of the 1970s. Buyers were offered either a five-speed manual or a three-speed automatic gearbox, which helped sales in the USA, the land of the self-change slusher. Suspension is independent all round using MacPherson struts – unusual when most cars of this era were still employing leaf springs at

the rear. This makes the Datsun nimble and, with the rack-and-pinion steering, there is a very positive feel when cornering. The 240Z is an all-round thoroughbred.

The Z's one true fault is that it rusts – though no worse than any other Japanese car of its period. The only other niggle specific to the early 240Z is that lack of side mirrors. Many owners have cured this problem by fitting them, but if you want to keep everything original, like the faithfully restored Z pictured here, you need to drive motorbiker style, constantly checking over your shoulder, when



Clockwise from left: rare to find original 'dustbin-lid' trims; sohc straight-six; classic Z shape was planned to have been a Toyota; evocative cabin



DATSUN 240Z

Sold/number built 1969-'73/156,078

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc 2392cc 'six', twin Hitachi HJG 46W carburettors

Max power 151bhp @ 5600rpm

Max torque 146lb ft @ 4400rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, by MacPherson struts, lower links; front anti-roll bar

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 13ft 7in (4140mm)

Width 5ft 4in (1625mm)

Height 4ft 2½in (1283mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 6½in (2299mm)

Weight 2284lb (1038kg)

0-60mph 8 secs

Top speed 125mph **Mpg** 24

Price new £2288.33 (1971)



you discover that rear three-quarter vision is limited by the heavy rear pillars.

The Z range grew heavier and slower in its 1973 260Z and 1975 280Z guises, but the sales figures of all three of these models combined were amazing. With a total production run of 622,649, the original Zs held on to the title of the world's best-selling sports car until 2002, when finally beaten by Mazda's MX-5.

The Toyota Celica is not a sports car in the gutsy manner of the 240Z, but it does have performance-car looks with its baby-Mustang styling – and it has two usable seats in the rear. For a Z to carry four, you had to wait for the 260Z 2+2 of 1973, with its lumpen roofline. Released five years after the Celica had first made an appearance, the 1976 GT2000 Liftback added some real muscle to the range with its 2-litre, twin-cam four-cylinder engine, coded 20R. It was marketed by Toyota as a sports-touring model, which offered more comfort and a larger luggage capacity than the previous notchback versions. However, despite the Japanese manufacturers getting to grips with designing great bodywork, they often forgot the impact the wheels would have on the overall look. Consequently many Celicas, such as the car pictured here, feature aftermarket alloy wheels instead of the 13in slotted steel rims with trim rings that came as standard, or 14in alloys on the GT.

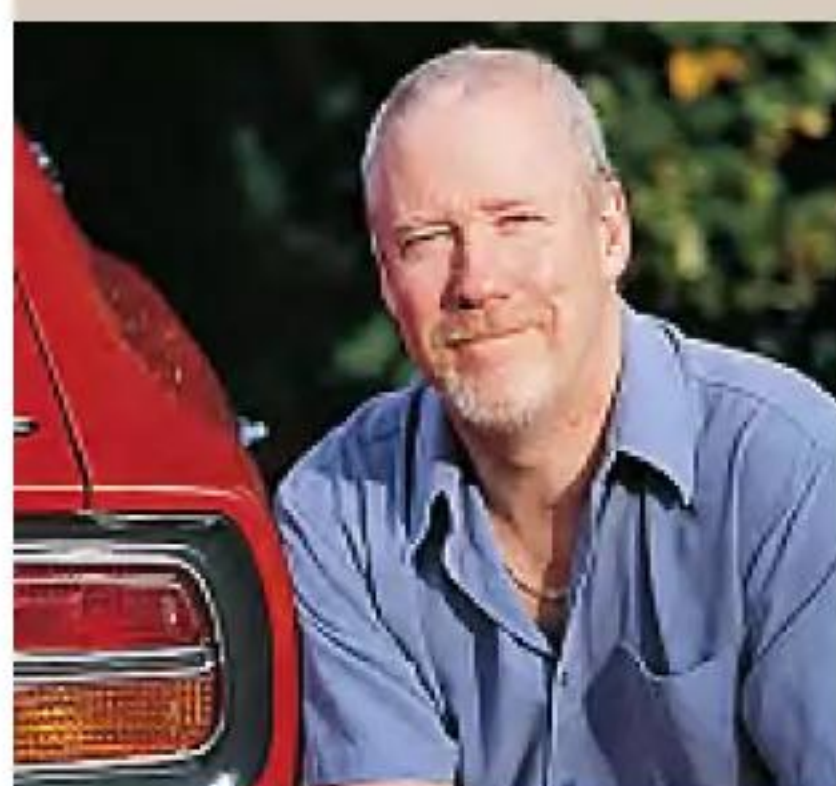
Climb inside the cabin and it's a bit like sitting in the cockpit of a small aircraft because the dashboard is so full of gauges, with the battery-condition indicator doubled up with an oil-pressure gauge joining the combined

temperature and fuel gauge plus speedometer, clock and rev counter, along with complicated heater slide controls, behind the attractive aftermarket Mountney wheel fitted to this car. Vision is good all round and, because the bonnet appears a lot bigger from the inside, you feel as if you are behind the wheel of a true performance car. The twin-cam engine, with its pair of dual-choke carburettors hanging off one side and smoothly curving exhaust manifold from the other, beneath an attractive aluminium cam cover, looks uncannily like a Lotus Twin Cam. The alloy-headed 'four' doesn't have the roar of the Z's straight-six, but produces a muted burble, hinting at its potential. With 118bhp at 5800rpm, a top speed of 114mph and the 0-60mph dash taking just over 9 secs, the Celica GT2000 performed well against others in its class, such as the Alfa Romeo 2000 GTV or the Capri 2000GT.

The suspension set-up is MacPherson struts at the front and a coil-suspended live axle at the rear, located by four links. Steering is by recirculating ball, outdated even in the 1970s when the much more positive rack and pinion was available. Road tests of the early Celicas discovered pronounced understeer, but this later 1977 model drives well and with more poise. This could be related to the 2.7in extension to the wheelbase that the GT2000 received, along with the fact that most modern tyres are a huge improvement over the original rubber. It always performed very well in the sales department, however, with a total of more than a million first-generation Celicas being churned out of the factory before the end of the production run in August 1977.

The Mazda RX-7 S1 has been recognised as a true classic only relatively recently compared to the 240Z and the Celica. The RX-7's heritage stems from Mazda's first rotary-powered sports car, the Cosmo Sport, released in small numbers in 1967. Despite other manufacturers, (including NSU), trying and then giving up on the rotary due to technical problems – mostly down to the difficulty of arriving at durable rotor-tip seals, along with achieving sufficient

CHAIRMAN'S CHOICE JON NEWLYN

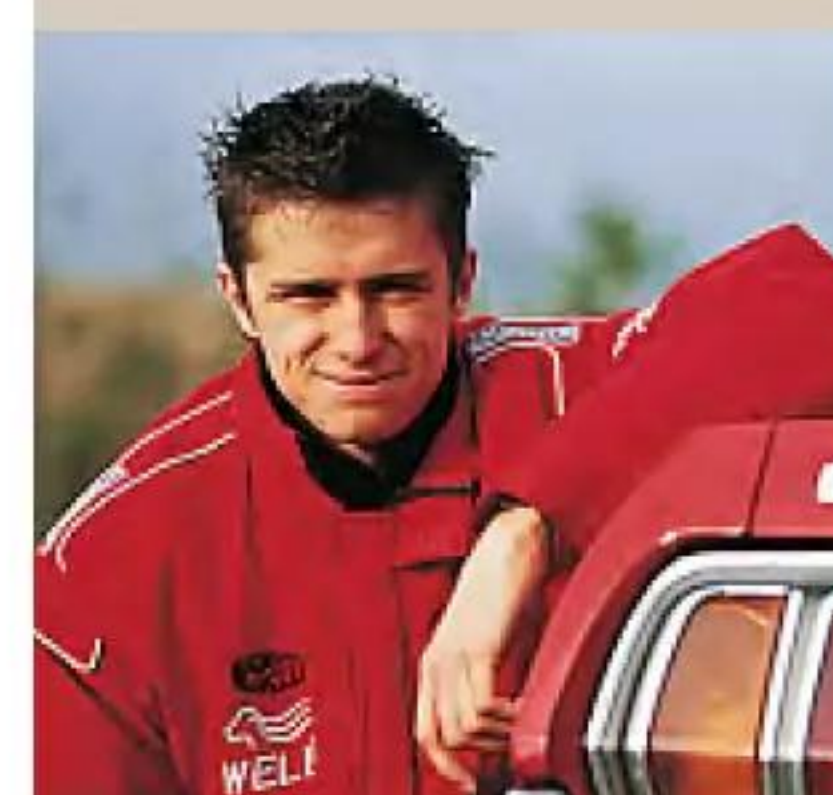


Jon Newlyn is the chairman of the Classic Z Register and has owned the oldest right-hand-drive Datsun 240Z in the northern

hemisphere since 1988. All of the first UK road tests were done using this particular car, meaning that it is the basis for the 240Z performance data in this country. Jon bought it as little more than a runner, but has restored it to as-new condition – a project that was completed in 2003. "I wanted a car that wouldn't age – the 240Z was the natural choice," he enthuses.



CLASSIC NEWCOMER CHRIS SROSBREE



As the son of a Japanese-car enthusiast, it was inevitable Chris Shrosbree would catch the same bug. He first saw this Celica, a rare

car in twin-cam form in the UK, at the 2003 Japanese Auto Extravaganza and purchased it just before his 21st birthday a month later. "As soon as I saw the car, I knew I had to buy it," he recalls. Used every day, it gives him a practical classic car, but with a high-performance twist that gets noticed. It won Best Classic Car at the 2004 JAE.

TOYOTA CELICA GT2000

Sold/number built 1970-'77/1,210,951

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, dohc 1968cc 'four', twin Mikuni-Solex twin-choke sidedraught carburettors

Max power 118bhp @ 5800rpm

Max torque 112lb ft @ 5200rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, four links, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 13ft 11½in (4255mm)

Width 5ft 3½in (1613mm)

Height 4ft 7in (1397mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 14¼in (2494mm)

Weight 2356lb (1069kg)

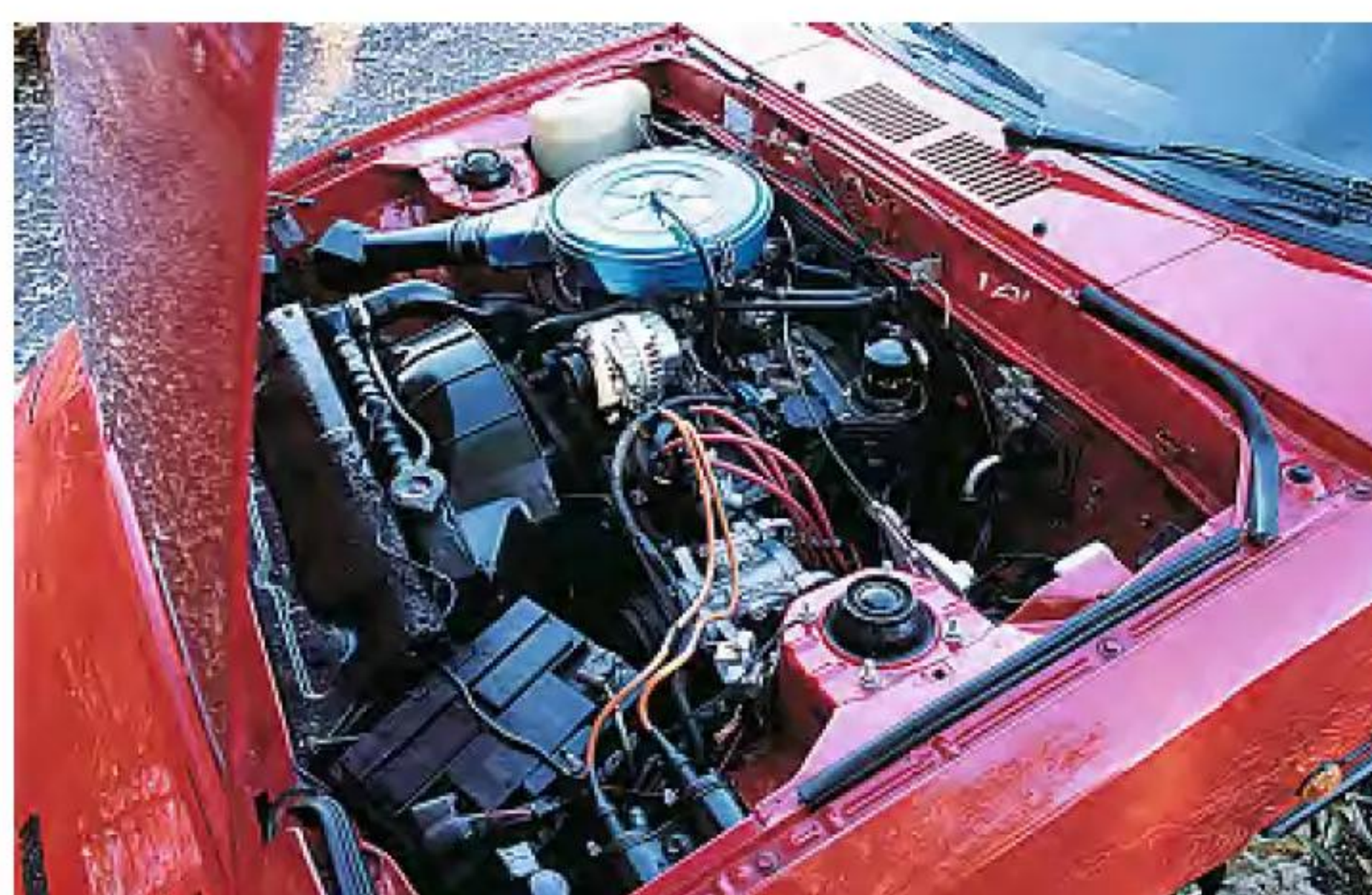
0-60mph 9.3 secs

Top speed 114mph **Mpg** 28

Price new £4089 (1977)

Clockwise: Liftback is a dead ringer for '68 Mustang; Nissan-sourced alloys - original wheels are GM Rallye-style steels; twin-cam 'four'; retrimmed cabin





Clockwise from left: smooth alloy wheels; rotary is lost under the plumbing and alternator; handling is excellent; it's the '80s, we're swathed in grey velour



MAZDA RX-7 S1

Sold/number built 1978-'85/474,565

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron/alloy 1146cc twin-rotor Wankel, single Nikki four-barrel carburettor

Max power 115bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 112lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by MacPherson struts **rear** live axle, trailing arms, Watt linkage, coil springs, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo (early cars drums rear)

Length 14ft 3/4in (4293mm)

Width 5ft 6in (1676mm)

Height 4ft 13/4in (1270mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 11in (2413mm)

Weight 2240lb (1018kg)

0-60mph 8.6 secs

Top speed 126mph **Mpg** 18-26

Price new £8699 (1981)

fuel economy and clean running – Mazda persevered. By the time the RX-7 arrived, the teething problems had been solved and the rotary was declared reliable. On its release in 1978 the RX-7 was the world's only rotary sports car, and Mazda continued to stand alone as the sole car maker using this technology.

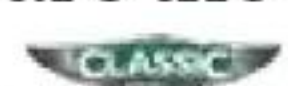
Across the eight years that the Series 1 was in the showrooms there were three versions, each with subtle differences both inside and out. This example is a 1984 Mk3 in original condition, but with the rare addition of air conditioning, which was a dealer option. The RX-7 S1 is a sleek-looking sports car and in Mk3 form has the additional attraction of alloy-on-steel wheels. There's a comfortable driving position and a great view down the bonnet, although it does taper out of sight by the time it reaches to the pop-up headlights, which is a bit of a nightmare for novices when parking.

Turning the key of the Mazda brings the 12A twin-rotor engine zinging into life and quickly settling to a smooth tickover. It will reach 60mph from a standing start in 8.6 secs, and go on to register 126mph – and all of this from just 115bhp at 6000rpm. It is easy to get carried away when driving the RX-7 because there is little low-down punch from the engine, but the rotary is so smooth that it encourages you to use plenty of revs. Although it can't 'blow up' like a piston engine, excessive revs dramatically reduces engine life and Mazda saw fit to include a warning buzzer that goes off at around the 6500rpm mark to remind drivers to change up.

The suspension set-up is MacPherson struts at the front and at the rear there is a live axle on coil springs, albeit properly located with a Watt linkage and paired trailing arms on each side. It is surprising just how well this works on the RX-7 – it delivers solid handling not only

for its era, but even by today's standards, too. Oversteer can be provoked, but it is very predictable and a quick flick of the steering wheel soon brings everything back into line. Like the Toyota, however, the RX-7 features recirculating-ball steering, which comes as a bit of a shock on such a true sports car. The helm feels dead on straight roads and there's a couple of inches of play at the wheel, but it does become very positive when cornering. Nonetheless, its high performance made the RX-7 Series 1 a huge success in the sports-car market. With sales exceeding 570,000, it is the best-selling rotary-powered car ever.

These three models represent a time when high-performance cars were a little raw. Consequently none of them are perfect, but all have achieved sales success from a proven basic recipe. Although rust plays havoc with Japanese cars from this period, causing many of them to disappear from our roads, there are still enough of them around to become cherished classics. They remain beloved for their combination of stylish exterior designs and great engines – the 240Z's straight-six produces a fantastic sound, the Celica GT2000 four-cylinder is ultra-reliable, and the Mazda RX-7 rotary is amazingly smooth.

If you are looking for precise handling, then the 240Z remains the obvious choice. The RX-7 presents you with an unusual car that is fun to drive, while for an even more practical car that rides smoothly on bumpy English roads, the Celica provides the solution. Motoring has changed a lot over the ensuing decades, and the emphasis for many Japanese-car enthusiasts has shifted to how many modifications can be squeezed into one vehicle rather than keeping things pure, but, thanks to their iconic early status, these coupés often survive in mostly standard form. Perhaps the recent trend of making prequel films should be continued, because these three true icons are the natural stars of *The Past and the Furious*. 

Thanks to the owners; Paul Watson; The RX Seven; The Classic Z Register (s30.org)

SPIN DOCTOR VICKY SPILLER



Having bought this 1984 Mk3 when she was a student in 1997, the RX-7 has become a big part of Vicky Spiller's life.

Now a member

of The RX Seven group, she helps with organising events for fellow owners throughout the summer. The car is in original condition with more than 97,000 miles on the clock, but it still attracts a lot of compliments and trophies, the most recently being a Highly Commended at Japanese Auto Extravaganza. She laughs: "Driving a car with pistons seems strange to me!"



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BIG TIME

A man wearing a dark flat cap and a brown leather jacket is driving a Lincoln Continental Mark IV at night. The car's interior is visible, showing the dashboard with multiple gauges and a radio. The driver is holding the steering wheel, and a document titled "STARTING INSTRUCTIONS" is visible on the dashboard. The background is a blurred cityscape with colorful lights, suggesting motion.

Lincoln went large – and then some – with the flamboyant Continental Mark IV. Subtlety isn't its strong point

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



It crackles at first: a hesitant fizz, a pop and then some hot piccolo and trombone action weeps out of the speakers. The label on the 8-Track cassette reads *Ford Family of Fine Music*. You wanted Curtis Mayfield's *I'm Your Pusherman*; you get muzak and a sudden compulsion to buy frozen peas. Next up, no identifiable marks this time. Some Mandrill or Isaac Hayes, perhaps? Nope, that sounds uncannily like the plank-spanking antics of Hank Marvin. It is. Off. Try humming a few bars: "Ah got ma laydeez wi me, ah got ma laydeez wi me. Get down wit your own bad self. Huh!"

Enough. You're not Ron O'Neal and this isn't *Superfly*. He was keepin' it real when you were gnawing a Farley's Rusk. But it's hard to resist the temptation to live out every Blaxploitation flick cliché when you're driving this Lincoln Continental Mark IV. It's from 1975, so you know it's got soul. Quite.

Perhaps more than any other, the Lincoln epitomises the deep-seated divide between American and European tastes. In Britain, a 5074lb, 7.5-litre coupe that takes up quite so much acreage is a nonsense. Except that there's a burgeoning appreciation for the decade that sired it, and for Americana in particular. This is arguably the last honest-to-god Stateside dinosaur from an era that fashioned such hateful devices as the Mustang II and, shudder, the AMC Matador. The Continental isn't one of these laughably monikered US 'compacts'; it's unapologetically inefficient (nearly 19ft long and 6ft 8in wide, yet it barely registers as a two-plus-two), and it is all the more tremendous for it – this car is the antithesis of mundane.

Just look at it. Like a mock-Tudor semi in the Bronx, the Lincoln appears entirely out of place in the Home Counties: a whale out of water. Here's a car that was built to whip Cadillac and pummel foreign competition. Which it did by undercutting them all at \$8600 when launched, offering every conceivable extravagance. A few inconceivable ones, too – a Cartier clock? Rain-sensitive wipers... In the 1970s! With a straight face, the marketing guff talked it up as being 'Quite simply, the most beautiful car in America'. Considering the opposition, it probably was. Resplendent in a lustrous dark red – or, to quote the brochure, Dark Red – it appears utterly familiar yet entirely alien. Unlike the 'clap-door' Lincolns of the previous



Hint of Rolls in grille; hidden lights carried over from MkIII

decade, there's none of the clean-cut hipster elegance that lit up the big screen from *Marnie* to *Kalifornia*. Instead, it draws cues from its successful predecessor, the Mark III: concealed headlights, high and narrow, vaguely Rolls-esque grille and long-bonnet/short-rear-deck stance. Curvature is foreign, aside from the oval opera windows sunk into the landau roof's rear pillars, this extraneous glazing being an option on the car's debut in 1972 – and you're unlikely to find one without it.

Have you seen the size of those bumpers? Federal regulations had put paid to the once-envisioned integral items. The front one weighs 130lb, in place to dissuade anything travelling at less than 5mph from putting a crease in its bluff frontage. And then you get to the rear, that pseudo-spare-tyre hump long since a Continental constant – inelegant and pointless, yet wholly in keeping. Style is objective, presence is not. One out of two isn't bad.

The defining aspect of any American car is its interior, and the Lincoln doesn't scrimp on luxury. Or colour. The heady blend of varnished wood capped in chrome, overstuffed seats and buttons – lots of buttons – is pure Detroit chintz, and it's a formula that's rarely been deviated from ever since, except the timber here is real. Space isn't lacking, at least up front. The fat armchairs offer almost nothing in lateral support and dwarf anyone with less

than a 30in waist. That rotund Robert Conrad drove a Mark IV as TV private dick *Cannon* is no surprise. This is a big car for big men. Angela Lansbury wouldn't have cut it.

Adjust your seat – electrically, of course – and fire up. An initial chirrup from the starter makes way for a typical V8 rumble. Select 'D' on the chrome column change, plant the big right pedal into the shag-pile and the Continental shimmies as it puts the power down. As with most American cars, the initial inch of so of throttle pedal provokes a glob of serious urge, blunted as revs rise. Without binoculars, the nose appears a continent away, and the one-finger-twirlable recirculating-ball steering takes some acclimatising to, but soon becomes familiar. And so smooth. The transmission offers silken changes; the ride is soft, but with little resonance reaching the cabin. Only when you punch a pothole does the Lincoln whisper disapproval. This is, after all, a separate body and chassis combo, the 1960s monocoques having proved an expensive experiment, so you can forgive the odd tremble. A poor rear three-quarter view does nothing to bolster spatial awareness, yet, despite the shallow 'screen, you can position the car with accuracy.

As any child of the 1970s will tell you, the Continental could whip any Latin firebrand during a fevered game of *Top Trumps* (on cubic capacity), yet, in emissions-friendly trim, the

power is only enough to hustle the Mark IV from 0-60mph in around 9 secs and on to 120mph overall. Factory figures typically highlighted the more favourable 365bhp gross, but net is more like 220. That's still respectable in isolation, but there are 2¼ tons to haul. Yet it never, ever sounds strained. On the move, even under kickdown, there's scarcely a murmur from that cast-iron 460cu in V8. At cruising speeds, it's eerily quiet.

You tend to pick your line through corners and stick to it, intimidating all. This isn't a car in which you'd ever consider driving quickly, yet, if there's room, the Lincoln will go where you point it. There's a surprising amount of grip, although understeer makes a predictable appearance when pushed. Oh, and it rolls, but never lurches, instead settling on its given trajectory. Fortunately, it stops pretty smartly, too, with front discs and 'computer-controlled anti-skid braking' – ABS to you and I – although only at the drum-equipped rear, where the Lincoln has less weight. Stomp on the anchors and there's none of the heart-stopping duck and weave shenanigans so often prompted by undernourished American stopping power. Otherwise, it's a wafter: a kitsch cocoon that pampers but rarely intimidates.

This is a cool car: not cool as in ironic; not cool as in the don't-I-look-hip-listening-to-Lalo-Schiffrin-in-my-bottle-green-Mustang-fastback



LINCOLN CONTINENTAL MkIV

Sold/number built 1972-'76/278,599

Construction steel perimeter frame, separate steel body

Engine all-iron, ohv 460cu in (7544cc) V8, single four-barrel carburettor

Max power 220bhp @ 4400rpm

Max torque 357lb ft @ 2800rpm

Transmission three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by wishbones

rear live axle; coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 18ft 9in (5715mm)

Width 6ft 7½in (2019mm)

Height 4ft 6½in (1384mm)

Wheelbase 10ft 7in (3226mm)

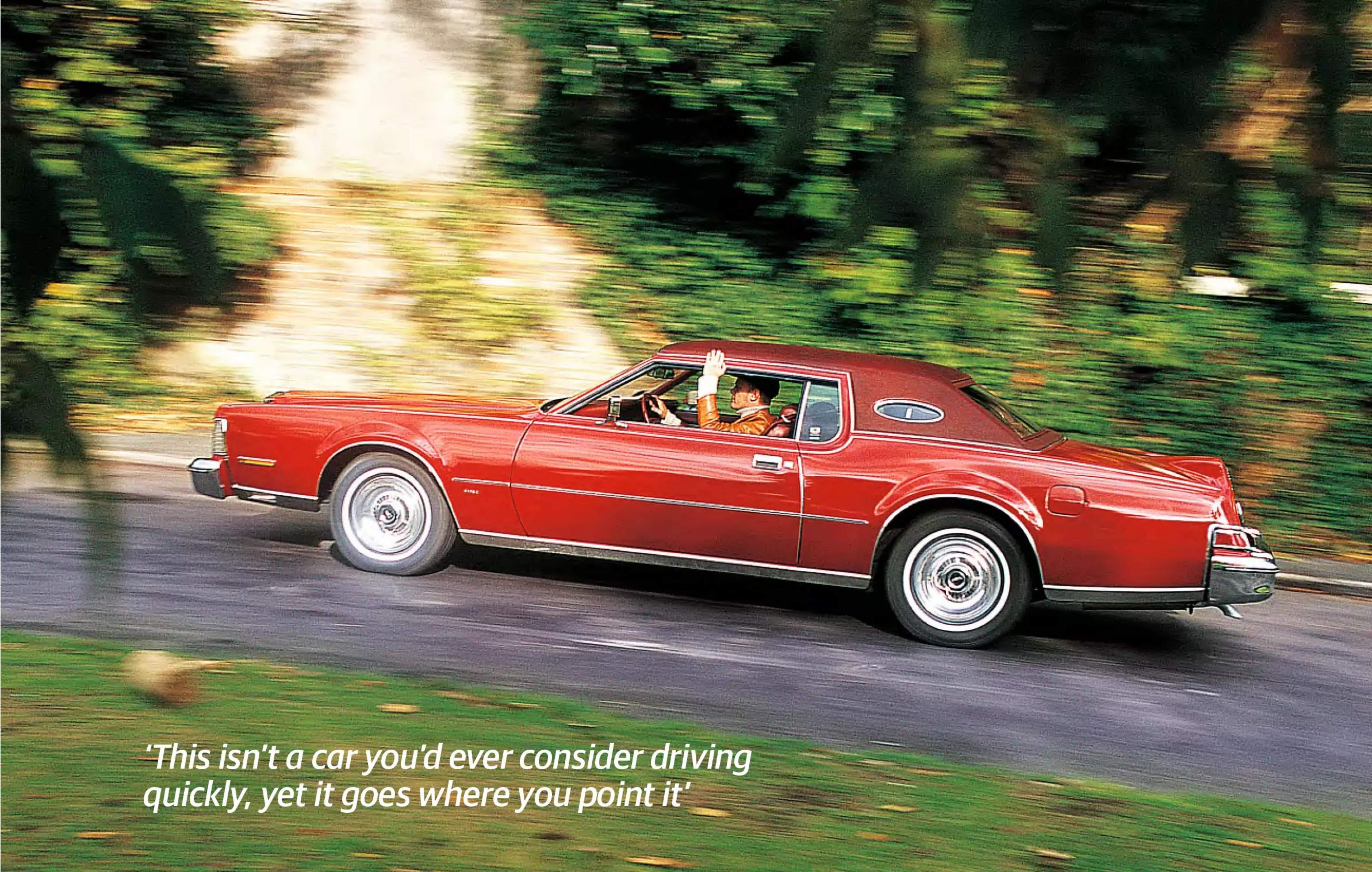
Weight 5074lb (2302kg)

0-60mph 9 secs

Top speed 120mph **Mpg** 12

Price new \$8600





'This isn't a car you'd ever consider driving quickly, yet it goes where you point it'



Above, from left: Garish wheeltrims; 460 cubic inches, yet just 220bhp; opera windows were *de rigueur* for the early '70s; electric everything inside



Ford vibes on 8-Track

archetypes currently rife with the capital's media tarts. No, its appeal is rather more singular. The Mark IV isn't a classic in any accepted sense, just resolutely bonded to a decade that to many represented the nadir of Stateside car design. At least until the following one. But that's missing the point. Nowadays, the Continental brand doesn't even exist, dropped because it couldn't keep pace with the imports from Yurp. This was from a time when Americans weren't quite so afraid of conspicuous consumption, and this trait was mirrored in its products. Big meant better and, in its natural element, the Continental was just that. Prior to the Mark IV being usurped in 1977 by the anaemic Mark V, Lincoln was shifting a record 50,000 units per year, outselling arch-rival Cadillac by 40% on occasion.

Americans wanted them, just as they wanted to see a bloke dressed like Elvis launch himself over, or into, the Grand Canyon. Glitz and

drama mattered. Over here we had lots of deeply terrible four-wheeled appliances with names ending in a vowel, and Eddie Kidd. Not without their fans, but not much else either. All of which will mean little to those old enough to remember watching *Cannon* first time around. If back then, however, you were of an age when must-see television was *Fingermouse*, the first sight of a Continental left an impression. It looked so glamorous to a trainee car obsessive who knew no better. And that's why, to at least one Gen-Xer, all that you've been taught, all that's been learned about what constitutes 'a good car' is left at the Lincoln's door. It doesn't matter. This jolts dormant memories. This makes you happy. This is cool. "Right Lionel, on four. Four – Ah got ma laydeez wi me, ah got ma laydeez wi me..." CLASSIC

Thanks to Howard Lewis for the loan of his Lincoln; American Auto Club UK (americanautoclub.co.uk)

TANGERINE DREAM MACHINES

The BMW 3.0 CSi offers the CSL experience for less, and has more than just colour in common with the exotic Alfa Montreal

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**







Two junior exotics in the Brecon Beacons on a sunny day in June hardly counts as ‘work’, does it? It was one of those days when that internal voice reminded me this is a hobby I get paid for, not what most would call a ‘proper’ job.

Great scenery, great cars, great roads to drive them on, and all with the full sanction of Gareth Lewis, who (handily) owns both cars and was enjoying himself as much as I was. The general mood was so positive that I didn’t even let the fractious encounter with an irate local or the fact that I lost my digital voice recorder (to an inquisitive sheep) spoil our afternoon.

No, it was about an hour or two later, when a Peugeot 309 reversed out of a pub car park in front of the orange BMW that I started to think somebody might have it in for us. Following in the (also orange) Alfa Romeo, I was plunged into a world of brake lights and screaming

tyres as the CSI nose-dived and its Michelin XWXs locked up (in a nice straight line).

I followed suit, registering surprise and relief when, in plumes of burnt rubber, the Montreal’s snout came safely to a halt a mere six inches short of the BMW’s bumper. Soggy pedal or not, there’s nothing wrong with those Alfa brakes. The only damage was a scuffed bumper on the Peugeot, having slipped its moorings due to a faulty handbrake.

Just before all of this drama unfolded, I was beginning to think I rather liked the swaggering Montreal. Compared with the elegant, capable BMW it was as much a flawed oddity as ever, of course: poorly packaged and needlessly flashy, but also easy to drive, flexible, fast enough and surprisingly refined.

I was even starting to forget about its heavy steering and forgive its woeful ventilation (and vision), and just enjoy the sophisticated warble of its quad-cam V8, the chunky machismo of its ZF gearbox and the overwhelming sense that

I was driving something quite special and truly exotic with a real sense of joy about it.

The Montreal was built from 1971-’77 to the tune of just 3925 cars. The shape, designed by Marcello Gandini at Bertone, has its origins in a pair of prototypes built in nine months for Expo 67 in Montreal. This was not just another automobile salon but the World’s Fair, hence Alfa’s understandable flattery at being the only manufacturer asked to contribute a dream car under the heading ‘Ultimate aspirations in the automobile field’. It emerged as a production vehicle, surprisingly unchanged visually, at Geneva in 1970. It was still swoopy and aggressive (with six giant vent grilles on both its rear quarters suggesting a mid-engined layout) and over its fixed quad headlights sporting those slatted ‘eyelids’, which were vacuum-operated and flipped down rather than up.

The four-cylinder engine of the pearl-white show cars had been replaced by a short-stroke, 2.6-litre quad-cam V8, front-mounted and



Clockwise: a wealth of gauges in the Alfa's cosy cabin; live rear axle doesn't help handling; the front-mounted V8 has bona fide racing heritage



The Bertone-styled Alfa Montreal has Miura-like lines, largely true to those of the two prototypes exhibited at Expo 67 held in, you guessed it, Montreal, Canada

ALFA ROMEO MONTREAL

Sold/number built 1971-'77/3925

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 2593cc 90° V8, Spica fuel injection

Max power 200bhp @ 6500rpm

Max torque 173lb ft @ 4750rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, twin trailing arms, A-bracket; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 13ft 10in (4216mm)

Width 5ft 6in (1676mm)

Height 3ft 11½in (1204mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 9in (2362mm)

Weight 2800lb (1270kg)

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 136mph **Mpg** 21

Price new £5077

civilianised (cross- rather than flat-plane crank and so on), but still recognisably the Tipo 33 sports-racing car unit, class-winning star of the Targa Florio, Daytona and Le Mans.

Mechanically fuel-injected by Spica, with Bosch providing the big sparks from a fancy new capacitor-discharge, transistorised ignition system, this all-alloy, dry-sumped, wet-linered 200bhp V8 was a formidable piece of technology – as you would expect to find under the bonnet of a car that looked like a baby Lamborghini Miura.

Not so the chassis architecture, which, with the exception of big ventilated discs all round, was the same well-honed and successful recipe found under Alfa's 105-series family of saloons and man-about-town GTV coupés.

Attempts by Alfa's brochure copywriters to make a virtue out of the fact that this near-140mph, £5000 luxury grand-touring car was running a live axle (albeit light, well-located and with an LSD) because it meant that the

roadholding was more 'predictable', sounded about as convincing as its claims that they had put the body into production simply because the prototype had been so overwhelmingly well received by visitors to Expo 67.

As ever, the truth lies somewhere in between, probably in the fact that Alfa Romeo needed a replacement for the late, and not very lamented, 2600 Sprint as a flagship model. The company was also, perhaps, looking enviously at the promotional value of the Dinos for Fiat. The Dino Coupé was certainly a natural rival for the Alfa Romeo Montreal – indeed, the two would be built on the same production lines at the Bertone factory for a while.

Montreal production began in May 1971 and almost 700 cars were sold that year; 1972 was by far its best year with 2350 sold, but it took Alfa Romeo until 1977 to dispose of the remaining 900 examples. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Alps, BMW was having a much happier time with its six-cylinder E9 coupés.



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BMW sold more than double the number of 3.0 CSis as Alfa Romeo did Montreals – and the German giant did so in two fewer years



In 1968 2800 CS form it had already received rave reviews in America. With more power and better brakes as the 1971 3.0 CS, it was well on the way to being the most successful car in the luxury coupé class, despite notoriously high prices and a nagging concern that its Karmann-built, pillarless body was neither as modern nor as rigid as the E3 six-cylinder saloons with which it shared its drivetrain. Aft of the front windscreen pillars, the E9 shell started life as the 1965-'69 2000 C/CS, but it had been subjected to such a successful front-end restyle in 1968 that buyers didn't know (or perhaps they didn't care) about its origins.

The basic shape can trace its roots back to the 3200 CS, designed and built by Bertone, with its almost identical goldfish-bowl glasshouse. Thus, the link with the styling house was well established: I even have a theory that Gandini, working for Bertone, gave the six-cylinder E9 body that handsome, pointed nose. It is certainly, in my view, too pretty to be German.

On carburettors, the manual 3.0 CS would

'The Montreal's purpose was lost in translation; BMW, in contrast, knew precisely what it was doing with the 3.0 CSI'

pull more than 130mph. With the addition of Bosch D-Jetronic injection, and a mandatory four-speed manual gearbox, the 3.0 CSI would nudge 140mph. Thus, on 200bhp (or, if you like, more than 1bhp per cubic inch), the big BMW coupés were in the 7.2-litre Jensen class, but with the potential, when driven moderately, to return 20mpg rather than 12.

Collectors tend to focus on the more exotic CSL these days, but these homologation specials, with their delicate aluminium panels and snug bucket seats, were a tough sell at the

time and, in right-hand-drive form, hardly any lighter, or faster, than the CSI. What's more, the CSI, with just 215 right-hookers sold in the UK, was always a much rarer car on these shores than the right-hand-drive lightweights, which numbered 500.

In a way, I was surprised to hear that Alfa Romeo shifted as many as 180 right-hooker Montreals, and that the firm even went to the trouble of creating a different exhaust manifold to accommodate the right-hand-drive steering box. Under the bonnet you can just see the four cam boxes almost hidden under the air-cleaner lid; remove it and you would find the long crossover inlet tracts and the Spica injection pump nuzzling in the middle of the 90° vee.

The Alfa is a cosy car inside, with massive, looming instrument pods that (in contrast to the BMW's obsession with warning lights) contain gauges for everything. The driving position is reclined, straight-armed but not excessively short-legged. Power windows were optional (but I have never seen a Montreal



Clockwise: great all-round vision and superb driving position in the BMW; large boot aids practicality; Bosch D-Jetronic injected 'six' leans over at 30°



without them), and all this one lacks is air conditioning. The heavy steering at low speeds and the absence of a decent boot or meaningful rear seats make this an immediately less handy car than the BMW. Yet it has a smooth, refined drivetrain, with lots of torque spread right across the rev range and the even, quiet tickover of a limousine that is at odds with the silky aggression it vocalises when asked to accelerate hard – something approaching a cliché of what an exotic Italian four-cam engine should be like. It sounds faster than it is, but in real terms, on the road, the Montreal is a match for the BMW in a straight line, particularly at higher revs where the spacing of its five gears, with a direct top rather than overdrive, are less of a compromise than the BMW's four.

Not that there is much wrong with the smooth, accurate Getrag gearbox in the 3.0 CSI. The low first squats the Bavarian coupé on its semi-trailing arms and squirts it up the road with all the sweet lustiness you remember, the

noises up front being the silky essence of what you expect from a 1970s BMW. That handsome, single-overhead camshaft straight-six, canted over at 30°, has a slightly hunting idle but makes a gloriously wholesome whine when extended. Revved to 6500rpm, it would show over the ton in third, but it is equally happy to potter along the high street in that gear.

The fabulous all-round vision and the brilliant driving position make you well disposed to this car even before you've turned the ignition key. It doesn't have the groovy instrumentation of the Montreal – if anything, the 3.0 CSI's dials are on the small side – but somehow the elegant, dull-finished wood and the overall sturdy feel give you a sense of confidence and solidity.

In a way, however, this was partly an illusion, because these Karmann-built coupés, with their internal rust traps and poor undersealing, proved to be the fastest-corroding vehicles this side of an Alfasud. On this point at least,

BMW 3.0 CSI

Sold/number built 1971-'75/8199

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc 2985cc straight-six, Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection

Max power 200bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 200lb ft @ 4300rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** semi-trailing arms, coil springs; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted worm and roller

Brakes ventilated discs, with twin servos on right-hand drive cars

Length 15ft 3½in (4658mm)

Width 5ft 6in (1676mm)

Height 4ft 6in (1361mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 7in (2624mm)

Weight 3030lb (1376kg)

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 139mph **Mpg** 16-20

Price new £7399



Just 215 right-hand-drive examples of this Karmann-built two-door were sold in Britain; it gives a polished ride despite this example being slightly lowered

OWNING BOTH: GARETH LEWIS

"The CSi was ordered new from Green Bower BMW and remained local to the dealer until my purchase," says Gareth. "The original owner was a serial BMW buyer who bought the latest model every two years: he didn't sell his old cars but kept them, amassing a collection of 13 low-mileage BMWs by the time he died. It's done 52,000 miles and has only ever been serviced by the supplying dealer. It is largely original – hence it's a bit rusty in places – but sits slightly lower on uprated springs and shock absorbers that sharpen the handling and reduce body roll. I'll have to have it stripped and repaired at some stage – it's a real keeper, so I'll find the money from somewhere.

"I know less about the Alfa. It's an original UK car, with its previous owner for 15 years. It is known to the Alfa Romeo Owners' Club and has previous concours wins, but by the time I got it, it had been badly repainted metallic orange, which had split and cracked. I've had it stripped to a bare tub, repainted it the correct flat orange and had the suspension rebuilt. This shoot was the first time it had been on the road since completion.

"Both are beautifully styled. The Alfa Romeo engine is really rather special, but it's harder work, a special-occasion car. The BMW is more relaxed and practical, in many ways a perfect all-round classic. Given they are rarer than a standard CSL and pretty much identical to drive, I don't understand the huge price difference."



the Montreal is almost certainly the more durable of the pair, even if it doesn't look it.

Neither of our contenders pretended to be absolutely the fastest way around a corner in the early '70s, but the Alfa was at a disadvantage, partly because it looked like a 'supercar' but mostly due to higher expectations. This, after all, was the flagship offering from a marque that prided itself on making perhaps the best-handling production cars in the world.

Approached with the right frame of mind, the Montreal is a stable, predictable and forgiving car to drive, and one that to some extent transcends the limitations of its live rear axle and nose-heavy weight distribution.

With good power steering, Alfa Romeo could have given it higher gearing, but once under way it's a reasonable compromise between feel, feedback and effort. Understeering gently, it settles happily into really long, fast curves but is much less at home in slower, tighter ones, where the price of a surprisingly good ride

on soft springs is more body roll than feels comfortable. The Montreal is fun to drive but lacks the effortlessly symbiotic flow that makes a 1750 or 2000 GTV such a joy on a twisty road. Latter-day owners have proved that this is easily cured with thicker anti-roll bars, but it seems odd that Alfa did not address it in period. It is an omission that tends to suggest its creators lost interest in it almost immediately, or never really knew what the Montreal was supposed to be in the first place: its purpose was lost in translation in the four-year hiatus between conception and production.

BMW, in contrast, knew precisely what it was doing with the 3.0 CSi. This car succeeded – and, indeed, still succeeds – because it managed the tricky task of bringing the driver appeal associated with smaller models (such as the 2002) into the most expensive car in the Munich manufacturer's line-up.

Drive it hard through sharp corners or long curves, take it for a lengthy, quiet cruise down

a motorway or just see how easy it is to park at the shops. The surroundings are posher and the ride is smoother and quieter, but the agile flavour is there, sure enough, with power steering that is as sensitive a compromise between effort and accuracy as could be hoped for in the early 1970s. It ensured that the car's inherently surefooted poise on supple but roll-resistant springing can be fully exploited.

It shouldn't matter all that much, decades down the road, that the BMW has fairly usable rear seats and a decent boot, but, in truth, it sort of does. They are intrinsic to the elegant concept of a car that, for me, is still the most beautiful and desirable BMW of all.

As for the Montreal? I loved it. Yes, there are better Alfas out there, finer specimens of early 1970s junior exotica. But as an example of irrational Italian automotive design, it is a gem that is sufficiently different in character from the BMW CSi that I, like lucky owner Gareth, could very happily own both. 

BRICK TO THE V

Malcolm Bricklin's innovative concept for a safer sports car was doomed to fail, but a drive in one of the few to reach Britain suggests it deserves a better legacy

WORDS **ALASTAIR CLEMENTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



Motor industry bigwig dreams of building his own sports car. Creates a wild, wedge-shaped contraption – with gullwing doors, of course – from a mix of unconventional materials. Then blags a load of cash from a government desperate to reduce local unemployment and constructs a factory. Builds a few cars – badly – before going bust under a cloud. It's a familiar tale to most classic fans, only this time the Henry Ford wannabe isn't John Zachary De Lorean, but Pennsylvania-born mogul Malcolm Bricklin. Instead of the De Lorean DMC-12's brushed stainless steel, his creation uses acrylic and glassfibre panelwork. And the country whose resources were taken advantage of wasn't Northern Ireland, but Canada. Oh, and one other small point: the 1974 SV1 arrived some seven years before the more famous De Lorean saga began to unfold.

If you haven't seen a Bricklin SV1 before – or

even heard of it – you are forgiven, because this example is one of only a handful to cross the Atlantic to Europe. Although it was marketed as the 'Safety Vehicle 1', the Bricklin's lines are hardly the usual rubber-clad, pedestrian-friendly curves of the tree-hugging genre. Nor is it any coincidence that the SV1's dimensions are broadly similar to those of a contemporary Corvette, as Bricklin told Brock Yates in *Car and Driver*: "People will buy safety if they don't have to look at it and they don't have to pay for it." Thus Bruce Meyers was tasked with the job of designing an affordable, crash-worthy sports car. Further design input came from Marshall Hobart and Ford-sourced Herb Grasse, while customiser Dick Dean built the first prototype and engineer Tom Monroe was also poached from Ford to turn the ideas into reality.

Read the sales literature and it's hard not to be impressed by the 'revolutionary new safety features' incorporated into the car: 'Energy absorbing urethane bumper, bumper-height side rails, gull-wing doors don't swing out in traffic, steel frame that surrounds occupants,

front and rear energy absorbers, fuel tank enclosure... the first production vehicle that is truly worthy of being called a safety vehicle.' And that's before you get to the paintwork – or, more correctly, the colour-impregnated acrylic gelcoat – which was offered in Safety Green, Safety Suntan, Safety White, Safety Orange and the decidedly tangerine 'Safety Red' you see here. Bricklin also claimed to be working on further ideas for later versions, including anti-lock brakes and externally mounted cameras to aid driver vision.

Blame the clumsy pillars for the restricted view, but they are thick for a reason: to disguise the hefty steel safety cell beneath. Yet, pillars aside, in many ways it's a clean shape. The big bumpers (mounted on shock absorbers that will withstand 10mph impacts without damage, rather than the 5mph required by Federal law) are well integrated, the wipers disappear beneath the bonnet lip and the black-painted lower body helps to prevent the car appearing too heavy and gives a longer, sleeker profile. At the front, though, it appears tall and narrow,

WALL



Styling hints at Corvette, DeLorean and TVR. Below: faux vents between pop-up lamps

with the Turbo Mag wheels sitting proud of the wheelarches, and there are too many ideas going on for a truly cohesive style.

Although its maker claimed the combination was 'many times stronger than steel or fiber glass alone' and 'impervious to the elements', the unusual bodywork finish – made up of 'space-age' vacuum-formed acrylic bonded to glassfibre panels – is pretty poor, nearly as rippled as the naff faux air vents in the nose and B-pillar that substitute brightwork for decoration. But who needs showy chrome when you have a party trick such as the electro-hydraulic 'gullwing' doors? Appearing for the first time on a production car since the Mercedes-Benz 300SL, those 90lb doors were problematic from the start. There's a hint inside, where a little trim panel by your elbow proudly boasts 'SV1 safety latch': pull the cover off and you will find a conventional handle beneath for when the complex electro-hydraulic systems fail and you're locked in.

And fail they did. Even when they were working they took a geriatric 9 secs to wheeze



TURNING OVER A MAPLE LEAF

Believed to be one of only two examples in the UK, this Bricklin can be seen at the Haynes Motor Museum in Sparkford, Somerset. One of more than 340 cars and motorbikes in the collection, the SV1 was acquired in December 2003. "The boss [the late John Haynes, OBE] told me to go and look for one because we didn't have a Canadian car," says curator Mike Penn. "This is an international museum, so we need a car from every major country. The trouble is, Canada doesn't really have a motor industry because Detroit is just over the border with the USA, so most of Canada's cars come from there."

Having found an example in *Hemmings Motor News*, Mike flew out to Detroit to collect the car but was surprised to find that the SV1's Safety Red hue – chosen so it could star in the museum's Red Room – is actually a lurid shade of orange.

The Haynes Motor Museum is open daily from 9:30am-5:30pm from March to October, 10am-4:30pm from November to February. For further details, call 01963 440804 or see haynesmuseum.org

open, which is why this example – like most – now uses a compressed-air system developed later by Bricklin specialist Terry Tanner. It's certainly impressive: turn the key in the conventional barrel lock mounted just aft of the driver's door, push what looks like an electric-window switch and the door flings itself silently skywards at an alarming rate. Press the other way and the door drops with a hiss and a clunk as the latch engages. The system is still not perfect: corner too enthusiastically and the switches on the centre console are ideally placed to release the doors with your elbow should you forget to disable them.

Look ahead from the low-set seat and it's impossible to see the nose, which plunges down away from sight, but ignore the great brown slab of a dashboard and it's quite an evocative view, with pronounced humps over the big V8 and the front wheelarches. That narrow look from without translates to a cosy cabin, but there are no complaints about the driving position, which is reclined and comfortable – albeit with your head just brushing the padded rooflining. Ah yes, the trim. According to Bricklin it's 'a luxurious, suede-like material' giving 'no-slip security'. In fact, he has an excuse for everything. No cigar lighter? 'We don't think smoking while driving is safe, we don't want you dropping a hot cigarette in your lap and driving our beautiful car into a tree.' Exterior looks a bit dull? Why that's because there's 'no superfluous chrome trim to either rust or rip off'. Marketing genius.

By now you've learnt to take most of Bricklin's claims with a pinch of salt – particularly when

you read him admitting 'I don't give a shit about cars' in *Car and Driver* – so anticipation of the driving experience ahead is not heightened by promises of 'impeccable' handling, 'designed to help keep you from getting into an accident in the first place'. But the SV1 is far from awful to drive. The steering is ridiculously light, but feels sharp and eager. There's a reasonable 52% front, 48% rear weight balance and not much roll – although the squeals of protest from the aged, doughnut-style BF Goodrich tyres when you get enthusiastic remind you that all of the safety gubbins makes this a deceptively hefty car. Do anything sudden with the throttle or steering mid-corner and it all gets a bit wallowy – this isn't a vehicle for chicanes – but for a car of its era and design (never mind 'Canada's sports car', the SV1's creation was an entirely American effort), it feels agile and poised.

After the drama of its appearance and the proclamations of its maker, perhaps the biggest surprise is the Bricklin's conventionality. It's front-engined and rear-wheel drive, with most underpinnings – including the engine and transmission for the first year of production – from the stodgy AMC Hornet. Thankfully, this example is a 1975 car, and for its second year Bricklin abandoned the 360cu in AMC motor in favour of the 351cu in Ford Windsor V8. Only 144 buyers opted for a four-speed manual in 1974, so for '75 a three-speed auto – also Ford-sourced – was the only option. Despite the Windsor's laziness and a reduction in power from 220bhp to 175bhp, if you hold it in gear for first and second it'll outpace the AMC manual to 60mph by nearly a second.



BRICKLIN SV1

Sold/number built 1974-'76/2897

Construction steel perimeter frame chassis and rollcage, glassfibre and acrylic panels

Engine all-iron, ohv 351cu in (5745cc) V8, two-barrel Motorcraft carburettor

Max power 175bhp @ 3800rpm

Max torque 284lb ft @ 2200rpm

Transmission Ford three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, trailing links, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 14ft 10½in (4536mm)

Width 5ft 7½in (1717mm)

Height 4ft ¼in (1224mm)

Wheelbase 8ft (2438mm)

Weight 3560lb (1615kg)

0-60mph 8.3 secs

Top speed 118mph **Mpg** 12-15

Price new \$9780 (1975)



Bricklin has good balance but wallows when pushed: Right, clockwise: gullwing doors add drama; 351cu in Ford motor; three-spoke President wheel is a nod to sporting intent

It's hardly surprising that a certain amount of development work continued into production. The SV1 went on sale in June 1974, just two years after Malcolm Bricklin had driven the prototype – itself a lash-up built in 83 days – to the First Pennsylvania Bank to raise capital for the project. Bricklin was just 35 but by all accounts a brilliant salesman. With the aid of a self-made movie, he drummed up more than \$1million to get his project rolling and set up General Vehicle Corp in Detroit – later admitting that his success was down to “99% luck, 99% stupidity and having a whole helluva lot more balls than anybody else”.

Those prodigious balls next took Bricklin across the border to Canada where, after a knock-back from the Quebec government, he found himself in the office of the premier of New Brunswick. He left with some \$9m of funding in industrial development loans to build two new factories in the high-unemployment areas of St John (assembly) and Minto (body production).

Not wanting to be another Preston Tucker, Bricklin tried to keep his new car under wraps until it was ready for production, and he made a decent fist of silencing the press. Not so when the car was launched at a huge bash in Las Vegas with the likes of Paul Newman, Bobby Unser and a gaggle of *Playboy* pets present – not to mention the convenient coincidence of a conference of car dealers in the same hotel. Before long he had signed up 247 of them – each forking out an \$8000 franchise fee – and claimed to have \$100m in advance orders.

Unfortunately, using a workforce made up

largely of miners and lumberjacks to build a complicated new car inevitably led to delays and production problems. When the press could get its hands on SV1s – they were so hard to come by that *Road & Track* had to borrow a customer's car – reviews were mixed, and when owners finally took delivery, they found their Bricklins were poorly put together. Doors failed, composite panels cracked, pop-up lights didn't and roofs leaked. Instead of Bricklin's projections of 100,000 sales after the fourth year, in the end a total of fewer than 3000 SV1s was thrown together by the inexperienced St John workers.

By then already carrying IOUs to the tune of more than \$20m, the government of New Brunswick could bail out the embarrassing project no longer. Bricklin went into receivership in September 1975, and the last cars had trickled off the line by early 1976. There was a brief stay of execution that same year, when an SV1 was sent to Newport Pagnell for Aston Martin engineers to assess the pros and cons of putting the Bricklin back into production, but, despite a positive reaction, the necessary funding was not forthcoming.

It's ironic that in death the SV1 has achieved the kind of success it never approached in life. Decades on, around 2000 of the 2897 cars built reportedly remain on the road, their strong construction leading to longevity and giving rise to stories of owners stepping unscathed from terrible accidents. It appears that the car, like its maker, was a survivor. But then, in the classic world, everyone loves a white elephant. Particularly if it's Safety White. 

BRICKLIN'S BABIES

Having dropped out of the University of Florida aged 19, Malcolm Bricklin started work in his father's hardware business in Orlando. By the time he was 25 he had turned it into the Handyman store chain, which was sold amid lawsuits, making Bricklin a millionaire in the process.

The Stetson-wearing entrepreneur moved into the automotive industry with a batch of Lambrettas. Japanese Rabbit scooters followed, made by oriental giant Fuji Heavy Industries. It was during a visit to Fuji's headquarters in 1968 that Bricklin got the idea of moving from two wheels to four with the tiny Subaru 360, a car light enough to drop beneath the 1000lb cut-off for Federal safety laws.

But motor-industry busybody and nemesis of the Chevrolet Corvair Ralph Nader scuppered his plans with an article in *Consumer Reports* accusing the little car of being unstable. Subaru of America stuttered, leaving co-founder Bricklin with a stockpile of unsold 360s. Resourceful as ever, he set up FasTrack in 1971. A chain of race circuits fronted by large leisure stores, FasTrack offered the American public a chance to experience track driving in diminutive racing cars based on, you guessed it, the Subaru 360. The FasTrack cars (below) were designed by Bruce Meyers to be particularly sturdy, but they



still proved to be too expensive to run and the concept was shelved – but not before

Bricklin had the idea of creating a road car based around the lessons learned with the FasTrack racers, which led to the SV1.

Bricklin was reputedly left bankrupt after the safety-car folly, but he was not the sort of man to stay down. He initially attempted to market Frank Turner's compact rotary engine, then once again moved into importing unusual cars to the USA. In 1983 came the Pininfarina Spider (Fiat 124) and the Bertone (Fiat) X1/9, then from 1985 he began shipping over the bargain-basement Yugoslavian (later Serbian) Zastava Yugo.

Following a brief – and unsuccessful – attempt to resume Yugo imports early in the noughties, Bricklin turned to emerging industrial superpower China for his next inspiration. His Visionary Vehicles LLC firm planned a joint venture with Chinese giant Chery Automobile (below), as he made an ambitious attempt to supply budget



luxury cars to the USA, but the business went on to become embroiled in legal

difficulties. He then shifted his focus to hybrid and electric powertrains before developing a three-wheeler EV.







THE MIDDLE AGES

First and last incarnations of Fiat's brilliant baby mid-engined sports car bargain, the enduring X1/9, come together

WORDS **SIMON HUCKNALL** PHOTOGRAPHY **MAX EDLESTON**

When famed designer Marcello Gandini presented a new and seemingly wacky concept car called the A112 Runabout Barchetta on the Autobianchi stand

at the 1969 Turin motor show, little could he have guessed that two decades later the road car it begat would just be going out of production. Not only was the show car's basic shape set to endure, but the Runabout's racing-boat-inspired wedge profile and razor-sharp lines hinted at a brave new world in automotive design, one that had the potential to shake the mainstream sports car establishment to its core. It just needed a visionary to realise it.

Fortunately, that person was just around the corner. Autobianchi had been subsumed into the Fiat empire the year before the Runabout was unveiled, and, while the concept was initially sidelined, when company chief Gianni Agnelli was shown the project in 1971, he immediately saw it as a perfect successor to the ageing, Bertone-built Fiat 850 Spider. What's more, the mid-engined concept car was already powered by an all-new Fiat engine, Aurelio Lampredi's 1116cc overhead-cam 'four' that had recently been fitted to the company's first front-drive model, the 128 saloon.

Development was rapidly signed off for a production prototype, known as 'X1/9' – 'X1' being the generic identifier for all prototypes at the time, and the '9' denoting the ninth car to be developed under the programme – and the moniker stuck. The two-seater was groundbreaking not only for its shamelessly Modernist design, but also because it would become the world's first mid-engined sports car built in any significant volume. Gandini's design positioned the X1/9's compact engine transversely behind the cabin and in front of its transaxle, providing excellent traction and a low polar moment of inertia for highly responsive handling. The engine was canted forward by 11° to fit snugly

behind the rear bulkhead, while also liberating space for a small but well-shaped rear boot.

Commonality with the 128 extended to the X1/9's chassis, despite the two models' very different configurations. The little saloon's MacPherson strut suspension was repurposed and located on the X1/9 by lower links and brake-reaction arms at the front, with wishbones at the rear, while retaining the 128's unequal-length driveshafts but doing away with its anti-roll bar. Braking was by solid discs all round, with no servo assistance.

If the X1/9 had a bugbear, it stemmed from its power – or deficit of it. We will come back to what effect that had on its sales, but Fiat's rationale for fitting the Lampredi engine was sound. The production X1/9 used the larger-capacity, more powerful 1290cc unit from the 128 Coupé, which benefitted from lightened pistons and conrods, bespoke exhaust and inlet manifolds, and a twin-choke Weber 32DMTR carburettor, compared to the milder 1300 fitted to the 128 Rally. The net result was an output of 73bhp at 6000rpm, 19bhp up on the standard 1116cc unit and an 8bhp increase over the Rally. Hardly heart-stopping, but good enough for 0-60mph in 10 secs and a top speed of 106mph (though *Motor's* first UK road test posted just 12.2 secs and 98mph respectively).

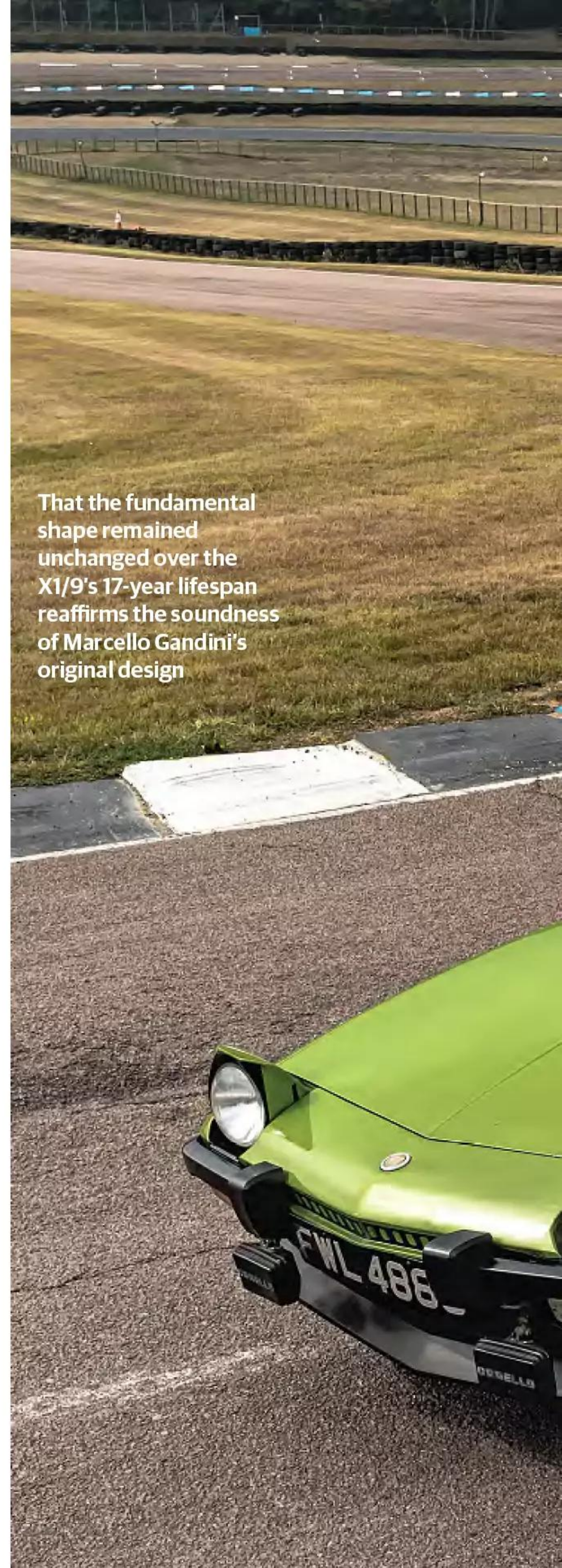
Performance apart, in every other respect the X1/9 was a supercar in miniature. Unlike its contemporaries, the Fiat's route to open-topped motoring was via a removable, targa-style roof that unclipped and located neatly in the front boot. This was at a time when there was concern for the long-term prospects of soft-top cars in North America, due to safety issues. The X1/9's solution neatly sidestepped these, while its roof-hoop artfully disguised a roll-over bar, which combined with a stressed central tunnel and ultra-strong box-sections at the sides of the passenger cell to create an immensely safe and robust body structure. Impressively, it ended up being one of only two cars – the other being a Volvo – to pass the new Federal 50mph head-on crash tests.



Crisp detailing and delightfully 1970s trim add character to the delicate and superbly balanced original 1300



That the fundamental shape remained unchanged over the X1/9's 17-year lifespan reaffirms the soundness of Marcello Gandini's original design



No great surprise, then, that after the X1/9's launch in 1972 US buyers immediately fell for its charms, with around half of the 30,000 vehicles sold in 1973 and '74 finding buyers on the other side of the Atlantic. And this despite Fiat eschewing the 1972 Turin show as a debut for the car, for fear of it overshadowing the new 132 (a shrewd move, since the saloon needed all the help it could get).

In stark contrast, you can only imagine the frustration felt by potential British buyers when Fiat Auto UK initially opted not to take the X1/9. The importer deemed it too underpowered among its peers, and if you look at independent performance tests from the time you start to see why: even the likes of the MG Midget and Triumph Spitfire had the Fiat nailed – not by much but, given the X1/9's image as a technical *tour de force*, it wasn't ideal. Fiat SpA was also tempting its UK importer with the prospect of a so-called 'X1/20', a more powerful mid-engined model that was to replace the 124 Sport, disincentivising take-up of the X1/9 still further. The X1/20 finally emerged in the UK as the Lancia Beta Monte-Carlo, meaning that Fiat buyers still only had



'The design had the potential to shake the mainstream sports car establishment to its core; it just needed a visionary to realise it'



Early, one-owner UK car still has its optional matching luggage (top). Cabin is comfortable (right), dash wears the name of stylist Bertone (above left)



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Bigger bumpers and two-tone paint give the later car a slightly fussier look. Bottom: stylised badging

the choice of an expensive, right-hand-drive-converted grey-import X1/9 from London dealer Radbourne Racing, or nothing.

When Fiat Auto UK finally bowed to customer pressure and opened its X1/9 order books in early 1977 – five years after the original debut – the car was warmly received by British customers, but that wasn't remotely surprising considering that most of its natural rivals were by then in their death throes. Priced at £2998, the X1/9 was cheaper than the recently launched TR7 (which would remain a fixed-head coupé until 1979), but more costly than traditional soft-tops such as the MG Midget 1500 (£2085), Triumph Spitfire 1500 (£2359) and MGB (£2843), all of which had been around for at least 15 years. *Motor* perfectly summed up the X1/9 after its UK launch: 'Stylish, fun to drive, economical and next to our own ageing rag tops about the nearest you can get to real wind-in-the-hair motoring at the price... What a car it would be with a bigger engine, though!'

Conveniently, we have both a 1300 and a later, more powerful second-series 1500 at Lydden Hill circuit, to test that theory. Judi Trow bought her 1300 new, almost on a whim,

based solely on its looks. Delivered to her in August '77, and still resplendent in its Metallic Green launch colour 45 years later, the 82,000-mile X1/9 remains remarkably original, save a respray some years ago. Approach the car and you're taken aback by how petite it is, sitting on its smart 13in Cromodora three-spoke alloys. At just 12ft 7in long and 3ft 10in high, it leaves even shorter drivers towering above it. The sun is out, so the top is stowed away in the 155-litre front boot, leaving just enough space below it for one or two pieces of luggage. The rear boot (120 litres) contains probably the rarest of all X1/9 accessories: two Bertone-designed soft bags, trimmed to match the car's seats – a wonderful period touch, and thoroughly practical. In front of that is a second hatch for access to the snugly installed 1300 engine.

Drop down into the oddly alluring olive/beige/brown/orange-striped cloth seats and you face a smart, sporty-looking four-spoke wheel, ahead of which a four-clock instrument pod sits atop a brown plastic ledge running the width of the cabin. A sloping central stack containing the sliding heater controls and a rather haphazard selection of rocker switches



Giorgio Pianta on the 1974 Tour de France – he would retire, but another X1/9 came home eighth overall

BABY FIAT'S BRIEF STAGE SHOW

In 1973, plans were drawn up to replace the Fiat-Abarth 124 Spider rally car, which resulted in the famed tuner developing two prototype successors in parallel: the 131 Abarth and the X1/9 Abarth.

Five X1/9 Abarth rally cars were built using either 16-valve, 1756cc 124 Abarth-derived units with twin Weber 44IDF carburettors or, in the case of one of the prototypes, a more extreme 1846cc 'four' with fuel injection producing 210bhp.

Radically different in appearance to any regular production car, the X1/9 Abarths were identifiable by their flared arches, ducktail spoilers and prominent, F1-style air intake mounted on the engine cover.

On only its third outing, in the 1974 Rally delle Alpi Orientali, the X1/9 Abarth was victorious, and it continued to enjoy considerable competition success through the season, despite some reliability issues. However, even though the development team was on track to achieve the car's homologation in Group 4 for 1975, Fiat instead opted to put its weight behind the new 131 Abarth rally car, and the X1/9 project was sadly killed off.





From top: seats and bonnet sport the crest of builder Bertone; 1500 better exploits the X1/9's excellent chassis



brings to mind the Ferrari 365GT4 2+2's arrangement – a logical connection, given the family ties at the time. Ergonomically, the X1/9 is what you'd expect of a 1970s Italian, with the non-reclining seat putting you in a slightly straight-arm position, knees bent and with the feeling that anything bigger than size-nine shoes would be hitting two pedals at once.

Fire up and there is no aural drama as the little Lampredi motor settles to a gentle hum behind you. Clutch travel is long, and the narrow-gated four-speed gearshift is relatively light and accurate, though not as quick and precise as it is in the 128 saloon. You soon realise that this early car thrives on revs, so it's fortunate that, other than a short phase of mid-range buzziness, the engine is generally smooth in its upper reaches, and a joy to work hard. It lacks torque, though, which isn't helped by the sizeable gap between third and fourth gears. Despite that, top still only results in 16.6mph per 1000rpm, meaning a dizzying 4200rpm at the national speed limit.

The X1/9's dynamics make you wonder if car development has hit reverse in the intervening years. The unassisted steering is sublime: light, linear, quick to turn in, and with just the right level of feedback through its 165/70x13 tyres. Front-end grip is tenacious, and it takes heroic attempts to even approach mild understeer in the dry. Body control over crests and slicing through well-sighted bends is impeccable: an MGB wouldn't see which way it went. Only when you really push do you start to feel the engine's weight causing the body to roll over the rear axle, but it's never less than composed.

So did installing the 1500 engine turn the X1/9 into the car it should have been from start? Receiving its world debut at the 1978 British motor show, the second-series X1/9 used the

recently launched Strada's engine – essentially the same unit as before, but stroked to give 1498cc and mated to a five-speed gearbox. While the chassis and most other mechanicals were unchanged, some of the X1/9's original design purity was lost with the addition of Federal bumpers, adding a not insignificant 5½in – 140mm – to its length.

The cabin was also given a full makeover, with a tidier layout, pushbuttons instead of rockers and accoutrements such as electric windows and – on special-edition models such as 'our' car – leather trim. Weight increased from 1940lb to 2028lb, but, crucially, so did the engine's power and torque, to 85bhp and 87lb ft – up 16% and 20% versus the 1300. Again, *Motor* tested the car and cut 2.3 secs from the 1300's 0-60mph time, and a staggering 15.3 secs from 0-90mph, with commensurate improvements in all in-gear acceleration figures.

Sam Read's 1984 1500 VS (Versione Speciale), purchased recently as his first classic car, is typical of the more generously specified X1/9s built before production halted in 1989. Technically speaking, it's not even a Fiat. Originally, Bertone only manufactured the base car at its Grugliasco plant near Turin, with Fiat looking after the final assembly at its Lingotto factory. But from 1981, the *carrozzeria* took on the full production and rebadged the model as the Bertone X1/9, though it was still sold through Fiat's dealer network.

Visually, swapping from 1300 to 1500 is like comparing two photographs of the same person taken a decade apart, their different clothes and barnets reflecting ever-changing fashions. Inside, some of the 1300's quirky character has been lost, replaced by a more logical but slightly soulless layout, although beneath it the same key elements remain (main instruments, steering-wheel design, seating position). But there is no denying that this is a more driveable car, and one that would be easier to live with day to day.

The 1500 engine possesses a deeper timbre on start-up, and you immediately notice how much more quickly it responds to the throttle in the low- to mid-range, as you watch the rev counter's needle sweep its way anti-clockwise around the dial (the 1300's runs clockwise). At 70mph, the engine rotates at 400rpm less, and the higher ratios in the gearbox are more closely stacked, making it easier to keep it on cam and better exploit the biddable chassis. The steering in this later model is perhaps a touch heavier, reflecting the car's higher kerbweight, but this X1/9 is still everything you'd expect: poised, sharp and exciting. Even several decades on, there are few new cars that can genuinely claim to be all three.

Thanks to Andy Rowley, X1/9 Owners' Club (X1-9ownersclub.org.uk); Reuben Elman, Lydden Hill Race Circuit (lyddenhill.co.uk)



Clockwise from left: flat-dish alloys retain the shape of the first-series car's Cromodoras; quarterlight-mounted mirror; plush Versione Speciale adds niceties such as leather trim and electric windows



'Visually, swapping from 1300 to 1500 is like comparing two photographs of the same person, taken a decade apart'



FIAT X1/9 1300

Sold/number built 1972-'79/
c160,000 (all)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohc
1290cc 'four', Weber 32DMTR
twin-choke carburettor

Max power 73bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 71lb ft @ 3400rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, at
front by lower lateral link, reaction
strut **rear** lower wishbones;
MacPherson struts f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs

Length 12ft 6¾in (3830mm)

Width 5ft 1¾in (1568mm)

Height 3ft 10in (1168mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 2½in (2197mm)

Weight 1940lb (880kg)

0-60mph 12.3 secs

Top speed 98mph **Mpg** 34

Price new £2998 (1977)

FIAT X1/9 1500

Sold/number built 1979-'89/
c160,000 (all)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohc
1498cc 'four', Weber 34DATR7
twin-choke carburettor

Max power 85bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 87lb ft @ 3200rpm

Transmission five-speed, manual, RWD

Suspension independent, at
front by lower lateral link, reaction
strut **rear** lower wishbones;
MacPherson struts f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs

Length 13ft 2½in (3969mm)

Width 5ft 1¾in (1568mm)

Height 3ft 10in (1168mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 2½in (2197mm)

Weight 2028lb (920kg)

0-60mph 9.9 secs

Top speed 108mph **Mpg** 37

Price new £4575 (1979)



KINGS OF THE CABRIOS

Five luxury drop-tops, from Rolls-Royce, Citroën, Aston Martin, Mercedes-Benz and Jensen, go head to head

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **OLGUN KORDAL**





Clockwise from top left: ZF gearbox is a welcome upgrade; Volante appears slender; beautiful straight-six; the DB6's progress is refined and suitably rapid

If Danny Donovan were Willy Wonka, then his DD Classics showroom, just off the A4 in Brentford, London, would be his chocolate factory. Every kind of taste in automotive confectionery is catered for, from an early '50s Citroën 2CV to Ferrari Daytonas and Mercedes 300SL Roadsters – both of the latter available in a choice of colours.

There must be 200 classics on site; if you walked in with £100,000 to spend and didn't go home in something tasty, you probably don't really want to buy and own an old car.

When applying the 'what would you take home?' test, one's natural urge is to go for pure exotica of the Ferrari/Maserati/Lamborghini persuasion; you almost trip over a Miura SV as you walk in the door and hardly acknowledge its Espada and 400GT brethren among the sensory overload of gleaming steel.

But better value is to be found in the realm of luxury four-seater convertibles. These are a more approachable, usable type of classic car, historically rarer than their fixed-head coupé siblings (in most cases) and always more sought-after because they are adaptable to the weather and thus make perfect sense

if, like most people these days, you put away your classic for the winter anyway.

They do not necessarily come with exotic running costs, and with the best power-assists the technology of the early 1970s could provide, they are not intimidating to drive even for old-car novices. Best of all, with four seats you can share the enjoyment with friends and family – or go some way to justifying your purchase to those who need placating.

So we have selected five luxury four-seater drophead candidates from the DD Classics fleet, ranging in age from the late 1960s to the early '80s, and in price from the just-about affordable to the truly eye-watering.

Did I say something about value for money? The price-tag of the DB6 Volante raises all sorts of questions about the cost of 1960s Aston Martins that are difficult to explain or justify. But it is hardly the car's fault that it commands a figure close to that of the others combined.

It is a rare, beautiful, handmade, alloy-bodied grand touring convertible with huge snob value and ego-boosting credentials. These open-topped DB6s have an odd history, because the first 1965-'66 cars were really uprated DB5s. Only from 1967 onwards did the

ASTON MARTIN DB6 VOLANTE

Sold/number built 1965-'70/215 (37 short-chassis, 140 Mk1s, 38 Mk2s)

Construction steel platform chassis, aluminium body over tubular steel frame
Engine all-alloy, dohc 3995cc straight-six, triple twin-choke Weber 45DCOE carburettors

Max power 282bhp @ 5750rpm

Max torque 290lb ft @ 4500rpm

Transmission ZF five-speed manual or three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, Armstrong telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, trailing arms, Watt linkage, Armstrong Selectaride lever-arm dampers

Steering rack and pinion (ZF power option)

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 2in (4623mm)

Width 5ft 6in (1676mm)

Height 4ft 6in (1372mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 5in (2565mm)

Weight 3223lb (1467kg)

0-60mph 6.1 secs (coupé)

Top speed 148mph **Mpg** 12.5

Price new £5062 (1968)



Clockwise from top left:
high-spec interior; wide 280SE
commands the road; 200bhp
3.5-litre V8; versatile Mercedes
is both stable and smooth

'It is the magic "3.5" on the bootlid that gets the collectors excited: this is where Mercedes' 200bhp V8 engine made its debut'

open car get the DB6 saloon-style upswept tail – derived from the DP Project racing cars – and were officially Aston Martin Volantes, not DB6s. This 1968 car, as perfect when inspected from underneath as it is from above, is one of 140 MkIs; a further 38 MkII Volantes were built from 1969 to 1970, identifiable by their slightly flared wheelarches.

With a handsome twin-cam 4-litre straight-six and a solid rear axle, this was quite a traditional vehicle even in the late '60s. Its powered steering, windows and hood meant it was a car that shifted the emphasis from touring to grandness. It is quite dainty by modern standards, however, with very little unnecessary ornamentation. The raised tail is

not the prettiest thing about the shape, but it probably only suffers in comparison with the DB4/5. The seating is low, the car quite narrow, and the overall feeling is of well-turned-out functionalism rather than showy plushness.

The Borg-Warner automatic transmissions were the kiss of death in these cars, but this one has a modern ZF four-speed that is much more versatile and responsive, as well as being better adaptable to the torque characteristics of the straight-six: the Aston accelerates with the sort of assertiveness you have a right to expect, and it sounds glorious doing it.

If, at this kind of price point, all rational comparisons exit stage left, at least the appeal of the DB6 is easy to appreciate. It feels mechanically refined yet ruggedly vintage, with smoothly responsive brakes and steering. Like a fine shotgun or an expensive pair of shoes, it is satisfying to handle.

I am not sure that it is quite possible to say the same about the Mercedes-Benz 280SE 3.5 Cabriolet, wonderful car though it is, because it is of a more modern generation. I have had the Coupé version and loved it – I've probably never owned an objectively better old car – but the enormous premium commanded by the

MERCEDES-BENZ 280SE 3.5

Sold/number built 1969-'71/1232

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-heads, sohc-per-bank 3499cc 90° V8, Bosch fuel injection

Max power 200bhp @ 5800rpm

Max torque 211lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual or four-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** low-pivot swing-axles; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 16ft 2in (4923mm)

Width 6ft ½in (1848mm)

Height 4ft 8in (1422mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 11½in (2731mm)

Weight 3850lb (1746kg)

0-60mph 8.4 secs

Top speed 128mph **Mpg** 17

Price new £7000 (1971)



Clockwise from top left: DS interior is unique and innovative; soft ride is hard to match; 2.2-litre has surprising torque; pretty and iconic silhouette

Cabriolet versions of these W111s has always been a little hard to comprehend.

In Coupé form it is perhaps the best-looking Mercedes-Benz of all; as a Cabriolet, with the (manually operated) hood piled up above the rear seats, it works a little less well. It is still a very handsome thing, even if the heavy bumpers and the massive, fat seats give it something of a war-criminal-on-holiday feel.

It is the magic number '3.5' on the bootlid that gets Mercedes collectors excited. This was a short-lived variant in which M-B's new 200bhp V8 made its debut; just 1232 were built. The top speed was boosted to more than 120mph, and seconds were chopped from the 0-60mph time.

Like most 3.5s, this fully restored, US-market example is highly specified to include air conditioning and the all-important Becker Mexico stereo; leather and power windows were standard. The column-shift automatic gearbox comes as no surprise, because almost all 3.5s were self-shifters; you have to be a little perverse to want the manual.

It has crisp, authoritative acceleration, with a subdued but expensive-sounding V8 snarl emanating from its dual tailpipes. It runs through its four ratios abruptly, and there is

'The Décapotable is all about the technology, the comfort, the elegance of a body that is the embodiment of chic'

a feeling that it would rather you eased up on the throttle before it will change gear.

If you are only used to the teeth-chattering ride of most modern cars, the suppleness of the 280SE 3.5 will be revelatory. It feels stable and happy enough on a motorway, apart from the low overall gearing (80mph is 4000rpm). There is something comforting about sitting behind that famous three-pointed star, amid lavish appointments of finely figured walnut and chrome detailing.

The non-original Nardi steering wheel in this car feels somewhat out of place, but it controls excellent power assistance that gives you as much information as you need. You quickly learn to trust in the Mercedes' natural poise

CITROËN DS21 DÉCAPOTABLE

Sold/number built 1960-'75/483

Construction steel punt, with steel, glassfibre and aluminium body panels

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohv 2175cc 'four', twin-choke Weber carburettor

Max power 109bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 121lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual or hydraulic semi-automatic, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by twin leading arms **rear** trailing arms; self-levelling hydropneumatic units, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering powered rack and pinion

Brakes powered inboard discs front, drums rear

Length 15ft 11in (4851mm)

Width 5ft 10½in (1791mm)

Height 5ft 2½in (1588mm)

Wheelbase 10ft 3in (3124mm)

Weight 2899lb (1315kg)

0-60mph 12.7 secs

Top speed 105mph **Mpg** 27

Price new c£4000



Clockwise from top left: Lecarra wheel; profile is appealing with hood up or down; 7.2-litre motor is biggest of those here; muscle-car styling suits V8

and its ability to make swift, majestic progress.

The DS Décapotable is perhaps the perfect antidote to the Wagnerian Mercedes. As an officially catalogued Citroën model, Chapron built 1365 between 1961 and 1971, although just 483 were on the DS21 base unit.

Like most Décaps, this car has the leather trim and the Jaeger multi-dial dashboard, although there are few other trinkets to be found inside. Not that it matters all that much; this car is all about the technology, the comfort, the elegance of a body design that is the embodiment of chic, and the rewards of driving something that – once you've got to grips with the counter-intuitive nature of its controls – doesn't give up its secrets too easily.

'The Jensen is still a great package and good value for money in the grand scheme of things. It could have kept selling past '76'

The driving position is commanding from the soft, armchair-like seats. To turn on the ignition and start, push the gearlever to the left: the engine sounds plodding but dependable. With the gearbox mounted up front, the floor of the cabin is nice and flat.

The hydropneumatics swallow the bumps like almost nothing else, and the super-sensitive, high-pressure braking system puts the car on its nose with the merest caress of the rubber 'mushroom' that sits in place of a conventional middle pedal.

What's more, there is no clutch: you simply manipulate a delicate little stick on top of the steering column, handily placed so that you can control the single-spoke wheel with a hooked thumb at the same time. As long as you remember to ease up on the gas between shifts, the changes are quick and smooth; and while 2.2 litres of in-line 'four' is no match for a straight-six thrum (never mind a V8's shove), the torquey Citroën goes well enough. The fascination of learning to drive it smoothly, and the high limits of its front-wheel-drive roadholding, make up for a lot.

The Jensen Interceptor Convertible is unlikely to appeal to the same kind of driver,

JENSEN INTERCEPTOR III

Sold/number built 1966-'76/6408 (all)

Construction steel body welded to tubular steel frame

Engine all-iron, ohv 7212cc V8, four-barrel Carter carburettor

Max power 284bhp @ 4800rpm

Max torque 383lb ft @ 3200rpm

Transmission three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, Panhard rod; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 15ft 8in (4775mm)

Width 5ft 10in (1780mm)

Height 4ft 5in (1345mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 9in (2665mm)

Weight 4030lb (1832kg)

0-60mph 6.9 secs

Top speed 140mph **Mpg** 10

Price new £9683 (1974)



Clockwise from top left: cabin impression is incomparable; Spirit of Ecstasy ornament; serene 6.75-litre V8; torque is key to Corniche's momentum

and with a comparatively affordable price it has a lot to offer in this exalted company. Launched in the teeth of the Fuel Crisis in 1974, it was a car that appeared to go against the grain. Convertibles looked as if they might be legislated out of existence, and not all that many people wanted to be seen in a 12mpg, 7.2-litre car – even if it did cost roughly half the price of a Corniche, which at the time was its only true rival in the luxury convertible class.

It was almost Jensen's last throw of the dice, and the model's initial success suggested that the company should have built a convertible version of the Interceptor years earlier. Carrozzeria Touring's drawings had been available from the start, and it was an easy transformation because the rugged chassis needed very little stiffening.

Of the 267 built, 80% were exported. Most went to America, where Frank Sinatra and Quinn Martin floated about Beverly Hills in them. Author Harold Robbins was a fan, too. That *Penthouse* magazine gave an Interceptor Convertible away to its 'Pet of the Year' in 1975 only added to the car's louche image.

In platinum silver, with a power-operated blue Everflex hood, the Jensen looks just as

good with the top up as it does with it lowered – something few convertibles achieve. Nor does the stowed hood eat into the legroom of the individual rear chairs.

Swathed in dark-blue leather, with new Wilton carpet underfoot, this car has the late walnut dashboard – boxy and unappealing to my eyes – with a cheap-looking clock. But it redeems itself by having that essential piece of Jensen equipment: an 8-Track player.

The alarming, muscle-car acceleration of the earlier Interceptors is lost in these later, 7.2-litre Series III models. Instead, the Jensen gained a quietly impressive thrust that still maintained the impression that it was a car hard-pushed to break into a sweat.

Its automatic gearbox is typically superb: you just put it into Drive and forget about it. The Interceptor has a loping stride and, on (and perhaps despite) firm springs, pleasing manners that belie its cart-sprung rear axle and front suspension that is not all that distantly related to an Austin Westminster's.

It's still a great package and still value for money in the grand scheme of things. Skilfully refined and developed, it is a car that could have kept on selling way beyond 1976.

ROLLS-ROYCE CORNICHE

Sold/number built 1966-'95/7370

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, ohv 6230/6750cc V8, twin SU HD8 carburettors or Bosch K-Jetronic/MK-Motronic fuel injection

Max power 215bhp @ 4200rpm

Max torque 325lb ft @ 1450rpm

Transmission three/four-speed auto, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by wishbones **rear** semi-trailing arms; coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar, self-levelling f/r (to 1969 at front)

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball (rack and pinion from 1977)

Brakes power-assisted discs (ventilated front discs from 1972)

Length 17ft ½in (5196mm)

Width 6ft 2in (1836mm)

Height 5ft (1518mm)

Wheelbase 10ft ½in (3061mm)

Weight 5346lb (2430kg)

0-60mph 10.7 secs

Top speed 125mph **Mpg** 10

Price new £12,078 (1970)

It is strange to consider that the Rolls-Royce Corniche Convertible was already a nine-year-old model by that stage. Who would have thought that it would still be in production almost two decades later? This left-hooker dates from 1980 and was sold new in Oklahoma. It has 52,000 miles behind it and is an injected model, so down on power compared with the home-market Corniches, but it's still a lovely thing. The graceful, curved-hip shape dates back to 1967 and the first of the Mulliner Park Ward drophead Shadows, but the Corniche name – along with various enhancements – didn't arrive until 1971.

It is based on the Shadow II, which means rubber bumpers, powered rack-and-pinion steering and, on this 1980 model, the much-improved, Silver Spirit-type rear suspension.

Inside, the level of detail, the action of the switches, the smooth silence of the power windows and the flawless gloss of the veneers put the cabin atmosphere in another league.

Where other V8s can't help but throb, this whispers – the aim being to divorce its occupants from the machinery and the outside world. The power deficit is enough that you might not be able to live with it (or the fact that

'Where other V8s can't help but throb, the Corniche whispers and divorces its occupants from the outside world'

the speedometer only runs to 80mph, in true American style), but in most instances it feels fairly brisk, with torque being the key factor.

Commanding views, a great steering lock and strong, smooth brakes give the Corniche perfect town manners. Some magic must have been worked on the suspension, because it rides delightfully yet takes corners with a lack of roll and understeer that is almost disquieting. I was looking forward to some roly-poly barge action.

While there are strong signs that prices of Corniches are picking up, they are still inexplicably cheap for a coachbuilt Rolls-Royce convertible. Each car took four to six months to manufacture at the Mulliner Park Ward

factory, and it was easily the most expensive convertible in the world when it was new.

If you want a Mercedes-Benz 280SE 3.5 Cabriolet or an Aston Martin Volante, nothing I say is going to change your mind. Ditto the Jensen Interceptor and the Citroën DS. They are great cars, rare cars, beautiful cars; but for me they only serve to highlight the bargain status of the Rolls-Royce Corniche.

It doesn't worry me – in fact it means I still might be able to afford one, and I understand why a car with so much social baggage might not be a statement everybody wants to make.

If you struggle to put these concepts to one side and fail to see the Corniche for what it is – an engineering accomplishment that could go on virtually for ever given the right attention – then you are missing one of the classic car world's last great affordable experiences. Ask yourself this: if you had to drive one of these cabriolets back home across Europe, which would you choose? I'd wrestle you to the ground for the keys to the Roller. 

Thanks to DD Classics (ddclassics.com); The Royal Automobile Club for the use of Woodcote Park (royalautomobileclub.co.uk)



The full collection on the driveway at Woodcote Park. The DS almost looks like an interloper in this company, but its place here is earned





A Merc for all reasons

Why spend top dollar on a Pagoda SL when the R107 is a better all-rounder for a third as much?

WORDS **DAVE RICHARDS** PHOTOGRAPHY **MALCOLM GRIFFITHS**

If your definition of classic means a car that stands the test of time, then the ubiquitous Mercedes-Benz R107 SL is a strong contender. Look at the raw statistics: a production run that lasted six years longer than Jaguar's E-type; a shape that remained unchanged through those 18 years; and safety features from launch that render the car usable in the cut and thrust of modern traffic today. Mercedes made 237,287 of them, so there are still plenty to choose from, and every part you could ever need to keep one on the road is still available direct from the maker. Classic ownership doesn't often come with such little pain. Maybe that's why the R107 has been overlooked – perhaps it's just a bit too painless to own to gain acceptance as a 'real' classic? Yet the third-generation SL has such good breeding and impeccable lineage that maybe we shouldn't have expected anything less.

Development of the 'new' SL started in 1967, and Daimler-Benz bigwigs wanted to distance it from the Pagoda W113, introduced four years earlier. The replacement was to be more masculine and create, said Mercedes, a more 'powerful impression'. At the time, it didn't realise that the very femininity of the Pagoda was what appealed so strongly and made it such an enduring favourite. Only now is its successor

beginning to confirm its classic credentials. Where the Pagoda was lithe and delicate, the R107 is squat and purposeful. The world the Pagoda inhabited was full of curvy cars, and the SL arrived with square-jawed movie-star looks that didn't follow fashion. In a market now full of huge, bulbous vehicles with vast, matching circular wheelarches, the SL's slim shapes, different front and rear, give form to each axle's function. The hood cover provides an effortless line from the base of the windscreen to the back of the bootlid. It gives good packaging, too, with a decent-sized load bay and extra space in the large luggage area behind the seats. A rear-seat conversion is available for those with young children.

Understatement is the R107's best feature. Pull up in a car park and it whispers discreet class, attracting comments from a certain type of person: taste and refinement are at home in its presence. The dash has plenty of chrome detailing, yet it is so slim that you only really notice when sunlight dapples across it and makes it sparkle. The body is angular – boxy, even – but check how the front of the wing line falls away so gently to the top of the headlights. The bonnet swage lines are slender, giving a taut, lithe fitness to the shape. The sum of these design features created a sports car that looks great no matter who is at the wheel, and the



styling that might have been off the pace at launch has proved to remain on the money over time. Even now you can pass an R107 in the street and it stands out as distinguished, but without overstating its case.

The harmonious, Minimalist-chic styling looks so cool that there's every reason to take a better look at the R107. It has a different cachet from a Pagoda and is much more usable as an only car, as Maurice Webb of Silchester Garage confirms: "People buy a 107 to use every day. Pagodas are bought as second or third cars."

Durable mechanicals make the R107 so usable that they easily rack up big mileages. Carl Wilford of Autobarn sells low-milers and says: "It's about time the SL came into the limelight." His customers are "absolutely fixed" on an SL. He adds: "There's nothing else on the market they want." He reckons that the car's quality made a rod for its own back: "They were so beautifully made that even one that is appallingly maintained can still drive really well if you're not used to them. But once you have driven a car that still feels tight, then you can tell – we sometimes turn away 40,000-milers if they don't drive well enough."

During development, the new roadster gained the moniker *Panzerwagen* for its strength and weight compared with the Pagoda. The R107 adopted many new features from Mercedes safety cars. The fuel tank was placed above the rear axle line, the doorhandles were anti-burst with pull-handle operation,

the steering wheel had a large central crash pad and the indicator-light lenses became larger, without chromed surrounds, and were shaped to allow light transmission even when dirty. The handling was tamed with the introduction of diagonal swing-axles, and all the running gear was shared with the bigger, heavier saloons, so component longevity was increased in this 'sports car' application.

The new W107 was nicknamed 'Reihe' or 'Series', which gave rise to the 'R107' tag. It was introduced on 23 April 1971 at a press launch held at the Hockenheimring, and drew instant praise for its strength, good manners and passive safety. Maurice agrees: "The R107 was a much better concept than the Pagoda, and they're easier to work on now."

The biggest problem with them is rust. Michael Lavers of Silver Arrows says the cars entered production with "a few" design flaws. "The air plenum gets blocked easily, and rot there is difficult to fix," he says. He also cites later right-hand-drive cars as having less space in the driver's footwell. "Left-hookers had a catalytic converter, and the floorpan was reshaped to house it," he explains.

Approach an SL and the shape is instantly familiar, and it's one that owners adore. Mike Hollis, who owns the featured 1972 Avocado example, says he loves all '70s cars: "But the SL is special because it looks so cool and elegant." With such an angular shape, straight panelwork is very important. There is little detailing: the

MERCEDES-BENZ 350SL

Sold/number built 1971-'89/237,287 (all)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 3499cc V8, Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection (from 1971: 3.5/4.5 V8; from '73: 2.8 'six'; from '81: 3.8/5.0 V8; from '86: 3.0 'six', 4.2/5.0/5.6 V8)

Max power 200bhp @ 5800rpm

Max torque 211lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual or three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones **rear** diagonal swing-axles; coil springs, progressive rubber bushing, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 14ft 5in (4390mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 1in (2464mm)

Width 5ft 10½in (1790mm)

Height 4ft 2¾in (1300mm)

Weight 1580kg (3484lb)

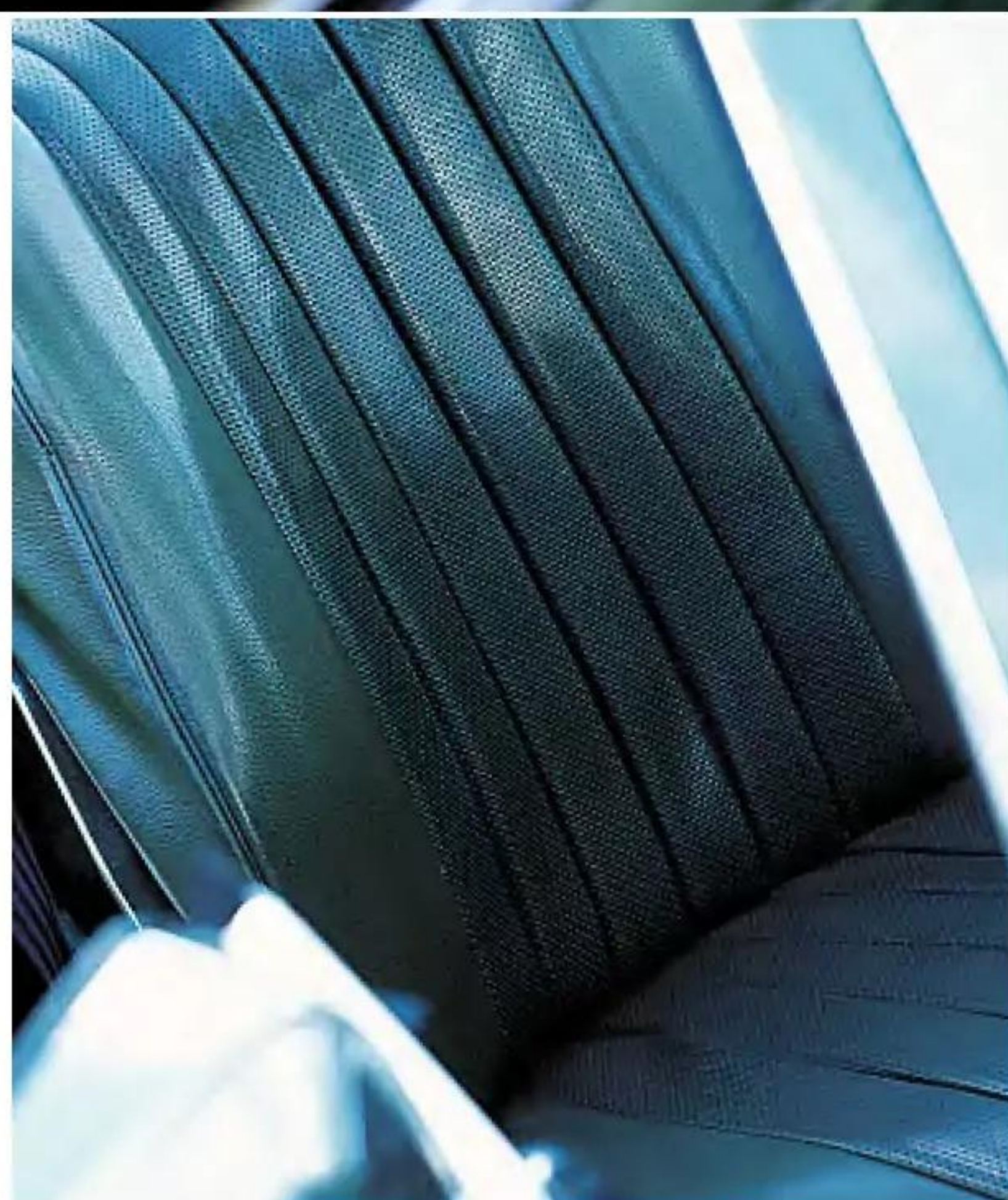
0-60mph 8.6 secs

Top speed 130mph **Mpg** 18

Price new £6995 (1973)

Chunky R107 SL isn't quite the nimble sports car, yet it handles much more sharply than the boulevardier image suggests





From top: good access to V8, but mind your head on grille; beautiful Becker Europa; huge padded safety steering wheel; glorious M-B Tex upholstery in early car

WHAT THE ENTHUSIASTS SAY THE CASE FOR THE DEFENCE

Judith Lerrigo from the West Midlands always wanted an SL. She says: "I knew I didn't want a rusty one, and spent a year and covered thousands of miles driving to see cars that were often very expensive but still rusty. I used to go into clean showrooms with immaculate-looking repainted cars, then start poking underneath and leave piles of rust on the dealer's clean, tiled floors. Eventually, I bought this 350SL, a one-owner car with a low mileage and corrosion from standing, and I had a friend restore it for me. I get excellent fuel consumption on a long run, up to 19mpg, but it drops severely if I use the car around town. I'm delighted with it because it now looks stunning. The only problems I've had are an accelerator cable that broke, and the headlight wipers not working, but because it's a low-mileage, good-weather classic, I don't need them."



Lyn Howells from Mid Glamorgan has owned his 1985 280SL since 1994. He says: "We've toured all over Ireland and Scotland many times. I get about 28mpg, and the big items of expenditure have been the valve guides – they needed doing because the engine was burning a lot of oil. The exhaust was pricey, too, and it's had a new hood and a respray. It's never let us down, and I'd recommend anyone to get one." He has the car on classic insurance, but has still managed to cover 60,000 miles over 12 years.

John Cushing's dad bought a 500SL new in 1982 to replace an early XJ-S. John recalls: "I was a teenager at the time and felt my dad's new car didn't have any wow factor after the Jaguar." He reckons it's the other way around now. "The Mercedes has aged better than the Jaguar," he explains. John's father bought another new SL in '89 and arranged to collect it from Mercedes' UK headquarters in Milton Keynes. "I went in the R107, didn't think anything of it," says John. "But all the girls from the offices came out and wanted to pose and have their pictures taken by the old one. I was amazed at the effect it had." The family 500SL has only covered 47,000 miles. "We've only put petrol in it – at about 17mpg – and had it serviced," John says. "It doesn't go wrong! That's got to be better than an XJ-S."



Mercedes engineers coined the R107's *Panzerwagen* nickname for its tank-like strength and mass



wraparound light clusters, straked to match the lower panels, give way to the body sides. The doorhandle is slim, and it's precise in operation. The door swings with its substantial weight, but it is balanced so there's just a sense of solidity as you close it. Settle into the wide seat, trimmed in M-B Tex on this early car, and the keyfob swings on the left of the steering column. Click the key to the right and the 3499cc V8 woofles into life. It has a muffled tone, and you can trickle this rare manual at low speeds with barely any throttle movement, even more so with an automatic. Mercedes sales staff were encouraged to push autos, with the phrase, according to a dealer-training memo: 'There's only one car better than a Mercedes, that's an automatic Mercedes'. Accepted wisdom says the manual is clunky, with a slow change, but this adds to the GT character. The engine loses its muted tone as you accelerate, raising to a sparkling crescendo at the 5800rpm limit. You have to watch the change from second to third: the gate is wide and the lever has to be pulled a good 4in toward the driver before slotting home positively. But familiarity makes it more natural.

Performance is brisk, with 0-60mph taking 8.6 secs – the figure and feeling belying the SL's accepted image. It's a car of contrasts, punching forward vigorously from any speed – not sporty in the sense of light weight and nimble road manners, but more of a grand tourer. As you approach a set of fast sweepers, the powerful brakes inspire with short pedal travel. The steering wheel is large, but feed the car into the first turn and the flat bonnet tucks in as the front tyres bite. The rear settles into the corner, the diagonal swing-axles providing a supple, seat-of-the-pants message.

The bar-room gossip says an SL isn't a sports car, but it communicates and grips mid-corner.

It will understeer if you press on too hard, yet as you wind the wheel over to switch direction, the rear set-up allows the body a secure transition. It rolls a little, but the rubber helper springs add roll stiffness as you push on. Yet the greatness of an SL is that you don't have to. The slower you cruise, the more you get seen and, with the fabric top stowed under the steel cover, few cars convey both Riviera chic and California sun – impressive global domination.

Mike says that he doesn't use the car enough, and confesses to buying it not because he had always wanted one, unlike many other owners, but because he knew the previous keeper. "He had had the car restored to a really good standard," Mike explains. "It's not perfect – there are a few sub-surface marks in the paint on the bootlid, and the engine bay isn't too clean – but then it is a 144,000-mile car." So when the SL came up for sale, Mike bought it, planning normal classic use. The first job was to remove the Pagoda-like hardtop and put it on to the wheeling stand the previous owner had made for it. Mike adds: "It has never been back on the car since – the hood is so easy to use, and if you are out and it starts raining, it takes less than a minute to put it up."

If you enjoy tinkering and making adjustments, you'd better look for your classic car pleasure in other marques, because this Mercedes-Benz is an easy car to love for its solid, no-nonsense behaviour and lack of fuss. Likewise, if you like your glamour dusted with the chintz of irrelevant embellishment, an SL isn't for you. But if you want a car that reaches beyond the boundaries of accepted classic status, as it emerges from the shadow of its older sibling, the R107 is top of the class. 

Thanks to Mike Hollis; Autobarn; The Mercedes-Benz Club (01780 482111; mercedes-benz-club.co.uk)

BUYING A MERCEDES R107 SL?

ESSENTIAL CHECKLIST

- 1 Corrosion** Check sills, front wings, air plenum under grille at base of 'screen, rear wheelarches, floorpans, rear panel, door skins and frames, subframe on pre-'80 models, hardtop (watch for paint match and flaky chrome from removal/refitting)
- 2 Soft-top** Look out for rips, thin fabric, rotting seams and cloudy rear windows
- 3 Interior** Watch for cracks in the dash pad, sunvisors and wood trim, plus fraying carpets and seatbelts
- 4 Seals** Examine all rubber seals around soft- and hardtops for deterioration
- 5 Fuel-filler flap** Look inside for the best clue to paint originality and resprays
- 6 Engine V8s:** check timing chains and tensioners, listen for noise from cams. Sixes: timing chains, head gaskets/overheating and valve guides/seals
- 7 Heater/air-con** Ensure servo motors and amplifiers work correctly
- 8 Brightwork** Check bumpers for corrosion, anodised parts for dents/dulling, grille for integrity of Mercedes star and broken black plastic slats
- 9 Underside** Underseal dries and shrinks, allowing sills and floorpans to sweat
- 10 Driveline and brakes** Ensure correct operation, free from clonks, with good synchros on manuals, and clean red auto transmission fluid that doesn't smell burnt



SPECIALIST VIEWS

Michael Lavers runs Silver Arrows Automobiles (silverarrows.co.uk). He says: "A person looking for an R107 isn't necessarily a normal, run-of-the-mill

classic enthusiast. They want a car that is beautifully built and usable, and offers little depreciation." His biggest problem is sourcing. "A decade or more ago we were selling 5-10,000-mile cars," he explains, "but they are such usable old cars that it is difficult to find low-mileage ones, so customers will now accept a car with 60-80,000 miles. They're bulletproof, but with a few flaws that stayed through the run. We're always searching for dark metallics because they look so great."



Maurice Webb, owner of Silchester Garage (silchestergarage.com), says: "R107s are marvellous, and good value for such a classy car. I get offered at least one a week, but many

lack maintenance and have been owned by unsympathetic keepers." He retains a few R107s in stock, but notes: "Someone interested in one isn't going to treat it as a classic – more likely it'll be their only car, but they're easy to work on and there are so many languishing now that you can even pick up secondhand parts."

SL SHOP



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FUNFARE FOR THE FAMILY MAN

The BMW 2002 Cabriolet and Triumph Stag prove that having kids need not mean an end to soft-top motoring

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **JOHN BRADSHAW**





Clockwise from main: Michelotti shape was a chic take on the Triumph family look; twin pipes emit a cultured burble; notorious 3-litre V8; handling is on the soft side of sporting; comfortable cabin

Feeling stressed? Forget the yoga and the pilates and get yourself a Triumph Stag. It's the burble that does it: obviously V8 in its alternating beat, but somehow a sound very particular to this often unfairly maligned but much-loved 2+2, it strikes a note of cultivated machismo that suits the Stag's laid-back personality perfectly. This is a car to suppress the most aggressive tendencies in any driver. Yes, a Stag goes quite well when roused – it is, after all, a 3-litre, near-120mph grand tourer – but rarely are these cars driven anything other than sedately.

That observation says a lot about the car, for this is not a vehicle to ignite competitive instincts. You just waft, emanating a sense of wellbeing that would probably come across as smug in any one of the Stag's many modern 'lifestyle' drophead successors. The difference, back at the dawn of the 1970s, was that the Stag didn't have many rivals if you were looking for a four-place open car with V8 power, suave Italian looks and winter headgear substantial enough to transform it into a cosy GT when the nights began to draw in.

For just over £2000 in late 1970 there was nothing like it. The ageing Mercedes-Benz 280SL cost more than twice as much (and didn't even pretend to have rear seats), while more comparably priced closed-roof supposed rivals such as the Alfa 1750 GTV and Lotus Elan +2S had nothing like the Triumph's versatility.

The story of the Stag is, of course, a well-known tale of woe. Conceived in the mid-'60s on the say-so of Canley engineering boss Harry Webster, it sold to the tune of just under 26,000 cars through to 1977. Underdeveloped mechanically, it fell victim to the boardroom wrangling and associated distractions of the newly formed British Leyland. When Webster moved to the Austin Morris division to oversee development of the Marina, the fate of his creation was sealed: as an expensive and troublesome curiosity in the BL range the Stag was doomed, particularly once the infamous overheating problems associated with the high-mounted, gear-driven water pump became common knowledge.

Thus tainted, the car had no future in the North American market for which it was intended and so obviously suited, and most Stags stayed in the UK. Here it has always had a healthy fanbase, however, and remains the most 'club-able' of cars that even once held the honour of being the UK's most stolen classic.

Obsessed with the success of the Mercedes 'Pagoda', Webster sold the idea of a larger, more luxurious open Triumph to his boardroom superiors on the basis that it would be cheap to develop – essentially a reskinned 2000, using the same running gear and suspension on a shortened version of the same floorpan. The initial plan was to use the saloon's 2.5-litre injected straight-six, too, but the Stag came to be defined by a new V8, the senior member of a series of modular four-, six- and eight-cylinder overhead-cam engines that were already too far down the pipeline when the Leyland merger happened. The first specification was for a 2.5-litre V8 with fuel

injection, but given its troubled history it is perhaps just as well that it emerged as a very oversquare 3-litre on a pair of Strombergs, good for a rather conservative 145bhp.

As the author of every Triumph body since the Herald, Giovanni Michelotti was naturally engaged to do the shape: a handsome 2+2 with curved hips that came together quite quickly once ideas of hidden headlights and a powered hood had been discarded. A stylish launch campaign pushed the Stag's credentials as a sophisticated grand tourer with international appeal – and understandably said nothing about the problems Triumph engineers had faced in getting the V8 to fit where it didn't want to go, while negotiating ever-changing Federal rules on crash safety and emissions.

From a distance, it looked as effortless as the BMW 2002 Cabriolet (which was launched the following year) appeared clunky and contrived. Announced originally as the fully open Baur 1600 Cabriolet in 1967, it re-emerged in 2-litre form in 1971 – complete with a targa-style roof that added 110lb to the weight and £1000 to the price when the first of the 354 right-hookers arrived in the UK in February 1973. In fact, at £3499 including taxes, the 2002 Cabriolet was the most expensive of the small two-door BMW family other than the turbo, and it cost nearly £900 more than the Stag.

It was a car in a tradition of Baur-built open four-seaters BMWs going back to the 320 and 326 cabriolets of the '30s. Formed in 1910 in Stuttgart, Baur also did open versions of the 501/502 (and made the M1 bodies), but it wasn't until the 700 Cabriolet that the firm got into a volume relationship with BMW that lasted until the 1980s and the E30 3-Series Topcabriolet.

The 2002s were produced at the rate of 500 a year, using parts supplied by BMW, and offered through to June 1975, but only in 2-litre, 98bhp single-carburettor form. The most significant option was a ZF automatic transmission, but UK buyers got locally made four-spoke alloys to sweeten the deal. It was never BMW's intention to take on the world with these cars, but by farming out the work, it could satisfy the limited appetite for an open car without upsetting the flow of its regular production line. Total Baur '02 output was 4210, of which 1682 were the original (and allegedly not very rigid) fully open model of 1967-'71.

The standard tin-top has a purposefully boxy, tenacious look, but the 2002 Cabriolet appears to have too much back end and not enough glass. It is one of those rare things: a drop-top that is more handsome with its roof in place.

This 1973 'round light' car has been owned by Tim Callaghan for 11 years, during which time he has had the engine rebuilt and fitted a new bonnet. It is telling, perhaps, that Tim is the 15th owner. He is fond of the Baur and uses it regularly, but freely admits that he prefers his 3.0 CSI. "My wife hates the car," he says. "It's a bit of a 'girl's car' but very reliable; I can leave it for months and it always starts straight away."

Like the Triumph's, its rear seats are of the generous '+2' variety rather than promising long-distance comfort for anybody older than 10 years. You can run it as a 'coupé de ville' with the roof panel stored on special clips in the boot, or all open with the rear section folded

'The Stag rolls somewhat when pressed, but it has ample grip and can be urged through a series of bends with satisfaction'



TRIUMPH STAG

Sold/number built 1970-'77/25,939

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 2997cc V8, twin Zenith-Stromberg carburettors

Max power 145bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 170lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual with overdrive, or three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** semi-trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 14ft 6in (4420mm)

Width 5ft 4in (1626mm)

Height 4ft 2in (1270mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4in (2540mm)

Weight 2807lb (1273kg)

0-60mph 9.5 secs

Top speed 118mph **Mpg** 20

Price new £2616 (1973)

'Even in Cabriolet form the 2002 feels feisty; it begs to be thrown about and feels entirely rigid and confidence-inspiring'



BMW 2002 CABRIOLET

Sold/number built 1971-'74/2713

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc 1990cc 'four', single Solex 40PDSI carburettor

Max power 98bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 116lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** semi-trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Steering ZF worm and roller

Brakes discs front, drums rear, twin servos

Length 14ft 2in (4318mm)

Width 5ft 2½in (1588mm)

Height 4ft 5½in (1359mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2½in (2500mm)

Weight 2337lb (1060kg)

0-60mph 10.8 secs

Top speed 106mph **Mpg** 28

Price new £3499 (1973)

flush into the bodyshell. The door glasses are frameless, but the rollbar is afforded additional support by rails that link it to the windscreen frame, which is good for structural rigidity if not for the overall aesthetic.

The hefty clamshell bonnet is front-hinged and opens to reveal an aftermarket strut brace, dual ATE brake servos and the canted-over in-line 'four' that was one of the cornerstones of BMW's post-war success. Compact and efficient, refined yet responsive, even in this modest single-Solex-equipped form it gives gutsy performance to match the 3-litre Stag if you are willing to stir its manual gearbox enthusiastically enough.

But first get comfy behind the three-dial instrument pod, fumble with the heater slide controls on each side of the steering column (for warm feet in top-down mode) and remind yourself that BMW built its reputation for producing cars that pleased their drivers by thinking long and hard about seat, steering-wheel and pedal positions, and their solid, evenly weighted actions.

A distinctively wheezy starter motor gives life to an engine that idles smoothly and near silently, but will rev to 6000rpm-plus with a well-bred whine of its camshaft chain. With virtually 100bhp per ton in saloon form, the 2002 was a revelation in 1968 and one of the great driver's cars of the decade. You can conduct it sedately with great pleasure thanks to a flat torque curve and accurate manual steering that gives a good lock and only feels heavy at low speeds if you are more used to pedalling modern cars.

Even in Cabriolet form it feels a feisty entity when extended. The short, smooth action of the lever and progressive, positive clutch bite allow you to revel in changing gear, blessing the close stacking of the ratios as you gun this wholesome, enthusiastic little car along. It begs to be thrown about just like any other 2002, and feels entirely rigid and confidence-inspiring. It's stable in corners – but not so much that it doesn't respond – and with a sense that you know exactly what all four wheels are doing through your hands and backside. The brakes are superb, with a lovely firm pedal that makes a nice fulcrum for heel-and-toeing, and as long as the squeaky roof panel is removed there are no appreciable creaks or rattles on suspension that is resilient yet supple.

Superficially, Paul Catterall's Mk1 Triumph Stag automatic is a more appealing car than the BMW, particularly in the Saffron yellow redolent of the Triumph's fleeting appearance in the Bond outing *Diamonds are Forever*. It has the early wheeltrims and BL badges on the front wings, and it is bereft of the headrests and body stripes that were Mk2 features.

This beautiful, one-previous-owner car is correct in all its details, right down to the radio. "I bought the Stag to replace a Morris Minor Convertible – having measured the garage first – in 2004," says Paul. "It's totally standard with no upgrades – not even a larger radiator."

With its central T-bar design, the Triumph has probably the most stylishly resolved roll-hoop of any car you will find, plus a great-looking rear end with those big, aggressively angled double-barrel tailpipes.

The Triumph is narrow for its length and feels no more roomy than the shorter BMW. It also has a much smaller boot. In fact, it feels as if you sit on the Stag rather than in it, with its shallow footwells. Still, the vinyl seats are more comfortable than the BMW's hard chairs, and the controls are rather more comprehensive – Triumph led the way in the early '70s in its use of fingertip stalks and warning lights. Nothing is quite as pleasing to the eye – or the touch – as in the Minimalist German, though, even if you do get electric windows, an adjustable steering column and a tilting seat mechanism, items not even available as options in the austere BMW.

Put the dinky 'T' selector into Drive and the Stag rumbles away amiably, with automatic gearchanges that are smooth enough but delayed sufficiently that you can't help but try to anticipate them in the change of engine note. Being an auto, it is low-g geared overall for modern motorway cruising, but it has acceleration not dissimilar to the manual version. A responsive mid-range kickdown gives the Stag a reasonably lively character.

For many, the benefits of light steering at parking speeds will outweigh concerns about lack of feel or feedback. True, the Stag rolls somewhat when pressed, but it has ample grip, does not wallow, float or pitch and can be urged through bends with satisfaction as long as you don't ask it to carry too much speed around the bumpy corners in which the BMW excels.

The shell feels every bit as stiff as the 2002's, the ride very acceptable. But as a car to drive quickly and well, the Triumph can't offer the rewards of the BMW because it does not engage with the driver in the same manner – ways that are easy to feel but hard to define. In fairness, it was never intended to be that sort of car, and had its creators got the engine right most buyers would have been more than willing to overlook minor shortcomings in the finer points of its handling. Had it sold in sufficient numbers, doubtless Triumph would have seen the benefits in sorting the rest of the car, the basics of which were sound.

At a time when Europe's motor industry was second-guessing US legislators on the future of convertibles, the Stag looked like a brave project, although given Triumph's success selling TRs and Spitfires to Americans it was likely seen as risk worth taking. The tragedy of the Stag is that it was a clever, attractively packaged concept that should have cleaned up against the overpriced German opposition. As nice as it is to drive, the 2002 is hard to warm to visually, an oddity and a curiosity compared with the glamorous Triumph.

I don't love Stags and will never own one, but I'm happy they exist. There is something slightly louche about them, and the passage of time has made their problems seem more like legend than hard fact. That you still see so many of them says a lot for the enduring appeal of a car that makes a much better classic than it did a current model. In short, it is a car with a feelgood factor that transcends its shortcomings, real or perceived. 

Thanks to The Stag Owners Club (stag.org.uk);
Richard Stern of the BMW Car Club GB's
O2 Register (bmwcarclubgb.uk)



Clockwise from main: substantial hoop incorporates windows; 100+ alloys were a UK staple; carb-fed 2-litre was the only option for the Cabriolet; elongated tail in profile; aftermarket steering wheel and piped seats



Return of the silent sports car

Bentley may have coined the term, but Jaguar surely perfected the idea with the V12-powered Series 3 E-type. So why does this maligned sports car remain so underrated today?

WORDS **MALCOLM THORNE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



With its original E-type launched in 1961, Jaguar created a world-beating sports car that was without a single serious rival. Indecently quick, achingly beautiful and sold at a bargain-basement price, it's little wonder that William Lyons' race-bred sportster became the darling of the Swinging Sixties. Here was a sublime pin-up to rival Twiggy's androgynous delicacy and partner the hippest icons of a generation. What cooler way to close trendy chat show *Dee Time* than with an E-type? The Jaguar was as much a part of the headlines as Geoff Hurst's hat-trick, Mary Quant's hemlines and Paddy Hopkirk's mastery of the Monte.

A decade into the car's lifetime, though, the world had changed. The Beatles had gone their separate ways, Simon Dee had signed on and,

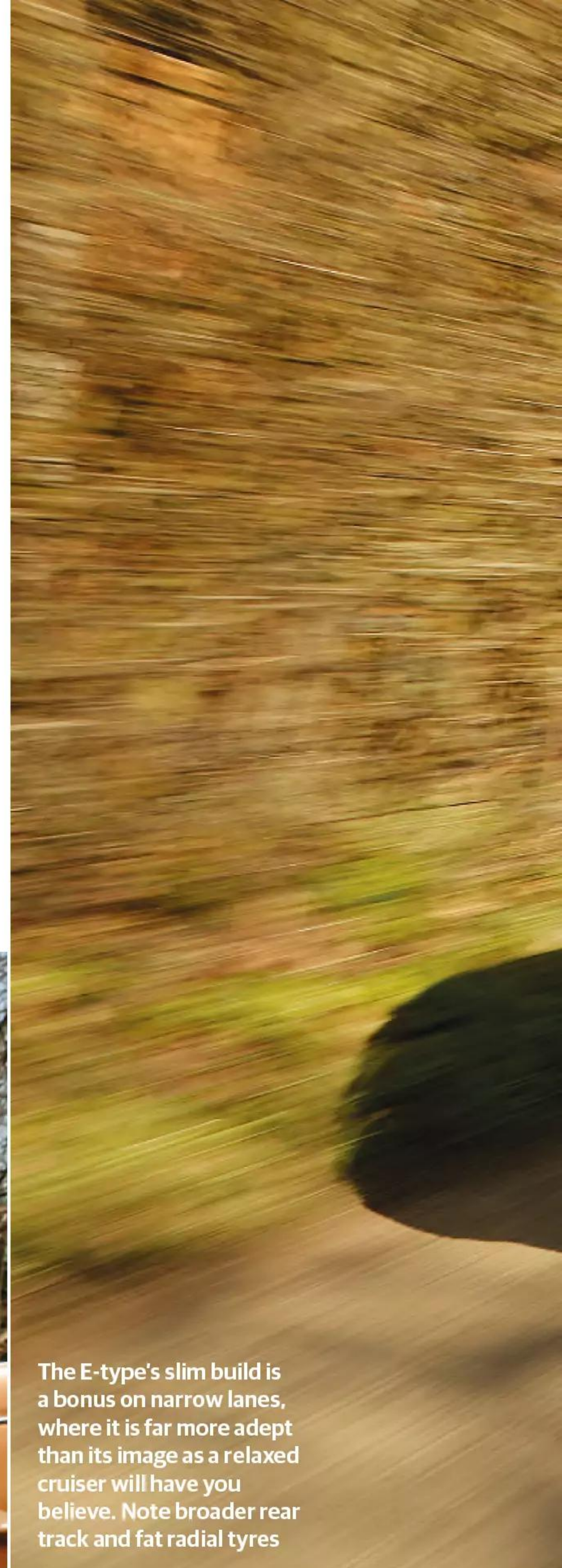
a far cry from the glory of 1966, England's 'Wingless Wonders' went out of the 1970 World Cup in the quarter finals. A year later the Mini Cooper was gone, too, replaced by a blunt-nosed by-product of British Leyland's myopic business plan. Like it or not, the '60s were over, and it was time to move on.

Dare I even suggest that, exquisite though the E-type had been at its launch, the shape was starting to look a bit dated alongside more modern designs? And the performance from its by then strangled straight-six had slipped further from the fantastic – albeit strategically enhanced – 150mph top speed that had stunned the world in '61.

"With the 3.8- and 4.2-litre, we'd had a very good car," recalls Jaguar's former chief test driver, Norman Dewis. "But the emissions regulations in the States had sapped a lot of power from the Series 2. Performance was what sold the E-type, but we couldn't clean up the 'six' any further without losing yet more



Clockwise: cockpit offers improved space compared with earlier incarnations; smaller, leather-trimmed wheel benefits from power assistance; chromed door catch and window winder



The E-type's slim build is a bonus on narrow lanes, where it is far more adept than its image as a relaxed cruiser will have you believe. Note broader rear track and fat radial tyres



"Performance was what sold the E-type. We needed to get back the power and had just the thing to do it"

NORMAN DEWIS



power. America was our most important market, and [Sir William] Lyons was insistent that we had to keep our customers there happy. We needed to get the performance back – and we had just the thing to do that.”

The answer, of course, was the magnificent V12 that had first appeared in the ill-fated XJ13 of 1966, although the engine’s history goes back much further than that. “It was designed by Claude Bailey in around 1958 or ’59,” explains Norman, “but at that time we were doing fine with the ‘sixes’ so we didn’t need it. It wasn’t until [Walter] Hassan returned to Jaguar from Coventry Climax that we did anything with it. We built a 5-litre four-cam version for the XJ13, and that produced 510-550bhp, but then they brought in the 3-litre limit at Le Mans, making it redundant. When it came to giving the E-type more power, though, that engine was perfect.”

Weighing in at 680lb, the new, all-alloy unit was remarkably just 80lb heavier than the old, iron-block ‘six’ and, as the world’s first mass-produced V12 since the late-’30s Lincolns, would give the E-type a unique selling point. In the transition from racer to road car, the engine lost a brace of camshafts and gained an extra

300cc, but it was none the worse for that. As Norman recalls: “The four-cam had more power, but Hassan thought that the extra cost, weight and complexity were unnecessary. As much as power, what we were aiming for was flexibility – and the V12 was very docile.” It was also a far more modern car.

Where the six-cylinder E-type had been a svelte evolution of a ’50s competition legend, the 1970s incarnation was very much looking towards the future. Bigger, roomier and easier to live with, the Series 3 defined what the next wave of sporting Jaguars would be all about.

Purists today are quick to dismiss the V12 as a kitsch *boulevardier*, a car whose greatest virtue – its turbine-smooth engine – is far outweighed by its gargantuan thirst. Critics also cite what they view as the desecration of a timeless shape. Or they bemoan the finger-light assistance that made manoeuvring a doddle but which robbed the steering of feel and precision. New wine shoved in an old bottle, complained some; a poor relation to a magnificent bloodline, said others.

Those who are prepared to scratch a little deeper, however, are rather more considered

JAGUAR E-TYPE V12

Sold/number built 1971-’74/7990

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 5343cc 60° V12, four Zenith-Stromberg carburettors, Lucas Opus electronic ignition

Max power 272bhp @ 5750rpm

Max torque 304lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual or Borg-Warner three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones, torsion bars **rear** fixed-length driveshafts, lower transverse links, radius arms; coil springs (twin coil-overs at rear), telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated front, solid inboard rear discs, with servo

Length 15ft 4½in (4685mm)

Width 5ft 6in (1679mm)

Height 4ft (1219mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 9in (2667mm)

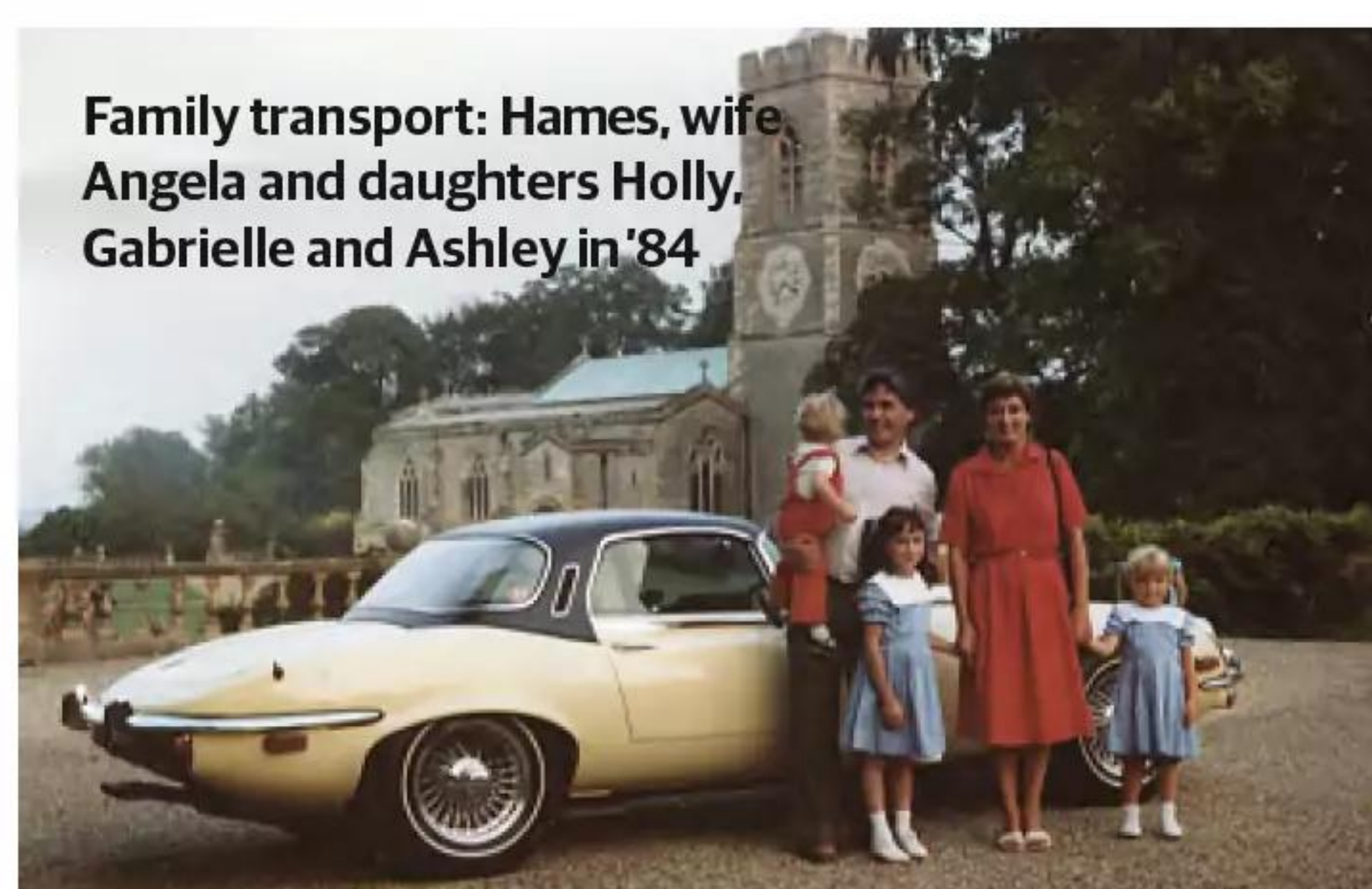
Weight 3316lb (1505kg)

0-60mph 6.3 secs

Top speed 143mph **Mpg** 15

Price new £3743 (1974)

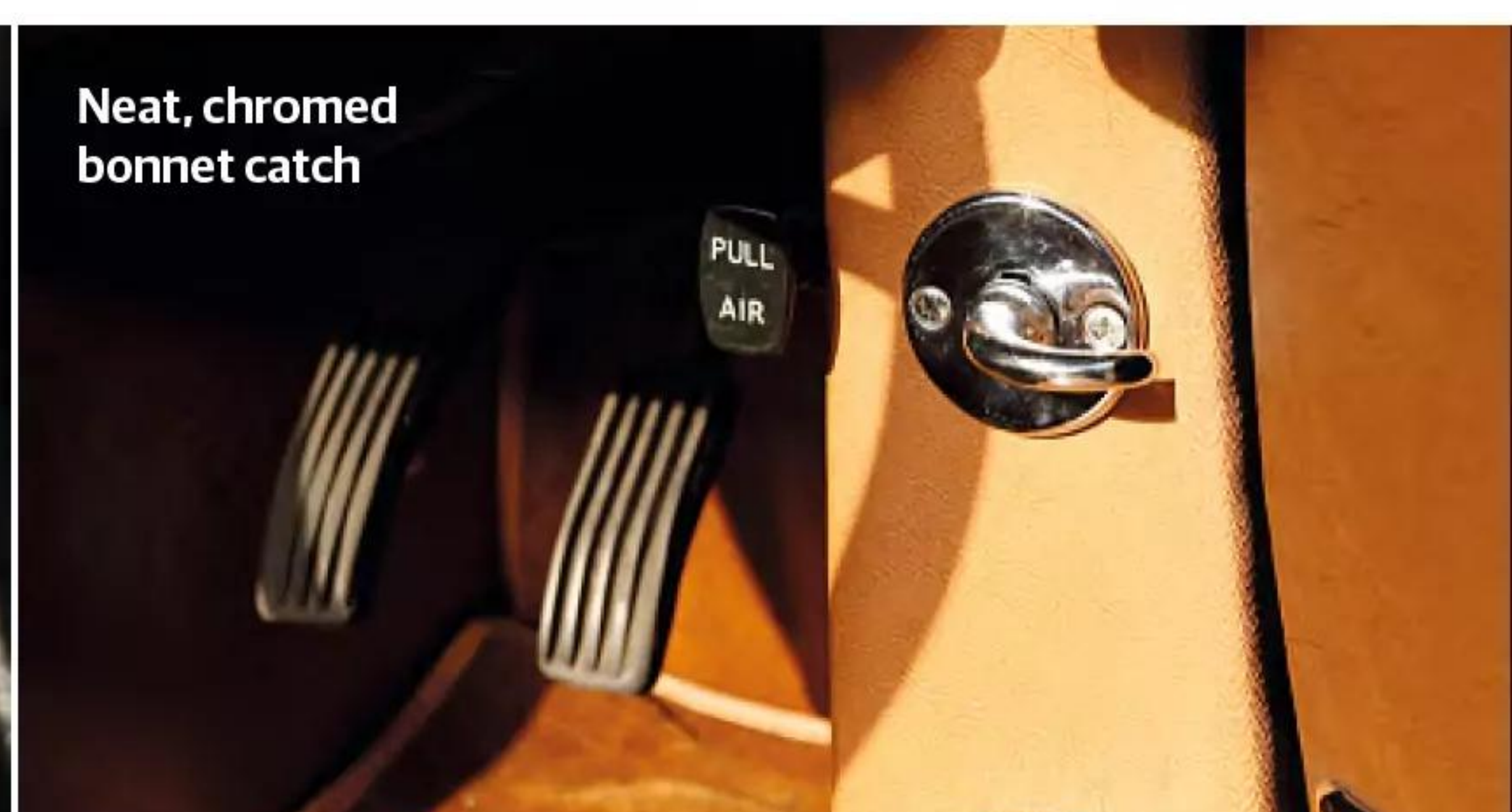
'It seems odd that people spend huge sums upgrading earlier cars when Jaguar had done just that for them'



Family transport: Hames, wife Angela and daughters Holly, Gabrielle and Ashley in '84



Period 8-Track player to accompany sonorous V12



Neat, chromed bonnet catch

in their appraisal. "I bought mine in October 1972," says civil engineer Alan Hames, who still owns his concours yellow roadster today. "I'd had a Series 2 since 1970, but was particularly tempted by the new engine – as well as the more attractive bodywork. I found that the Series 3 was much better to drive, with stronger brakes plus improved comfort."

Approach the V12 from a neutral perspective and you can see where Alan is coming from. Malcolm Sayer's update isn't exactly subtle – what was back then? – but to me it oozes period chic. It looks its best when painted a suitably 'bathroom' hue and riding on narrow-band whitewall tyres, the latter sadly absent from 'our' otherwise delicious Azure Blue roadster. Embrace it as a product of its day and, yes, this is a wonderfully stylish design that exudes early-'70s glamour.

The way in which the wheelarches have grown neat little flares endows the Jaguar with a far more muscular stance than that of its predecessors, with the wider track and fatter, low-profile tyres doing as much for modernity as improved dynamics. *Autosport* was full of praise in 1971, saying that the look gave the

new model 'tremendous sporting character'.

As you climb down over the broad, high sill, the familiar Series 2 dash is there, although the wood-rim wheel has been replaced by a smaller, leather-trimmed item. More significantly for the long-of-leg and pear-of-shape, access is easier and the cockpit roomier thanks to a wheelbase stretched by 9in, the same as the previous 2+2 model. Compared with earlier two-seaters, there's space aplenty to spread yourself out – to such an extent that, in the pre-child-seat '70s, Alan often used to squeeze himself, his wife and three small children into his. Try doing that with any degree of dignity in a flat-floor roadster!

Turn the key and there's no agricultural churning of the starter, no popping or spitting as the big, oversquare V12 winds lazily into life. This is no Latin drama queen, and there is no impression of individual pistons firing, no perceptible power pulses, just a seamless, subdued hush. The refinement leads you to expect the lag of a turbofan spooling up, but not a bit of it. Blip the throttle and the rev-counter needle flicks eagerly towards the 6500rpm redline (1500rpm higher than in the S2), falling





Clockwise: Jaguar toyed with injection, but carbs were used in the end – shields protect V12 from water entering via louvres



Signature quad tailpipes. Right: familiar S2 dash



back just as quickly. There's no need for a heavy flywheel on this sweetly balanced powerplant that John Bolster described as 'a devil for revs'.

Slot the stubby lever into first, then ease out on to winding Kent lanes. The clutch pedal needs a firm push – as does reverse – but swapping gears is a satisfyingly co-operative process. The Jaguar feels as though it's on your side, not conspiring against you. As you thread the roadster between the hedgerows, it takes time to realise that while the S3 is long, it's quite narrow. It's a mere 1½in wider than the first-generation Mazda MX-5, but 2ft 4in longer.

As you trickle along, the motor tricks you into thinking that it's spinning faster than it actually is. You find yourself changing up earlier than might otherwise be the case, but the immense torque – 304lb ft at 3500rpm – means you can almost treat it as an automatic. It will seemingly pull from any speed in any gear, which encourages you to be lazy. But then a short straight looms and you plant the throttle a little more decisively. The Jaguar surges forward with such gratifying ease that you back off and repeat the exercise, a demonic grin lighting up your face. I like this old E-type

a lot, and, the more I stretch its legs, the greater is its draw. With vast reserves of power and torque combined with the feather-light steering and sublime refinement, it leaves me thinking of the Bentley Turbo R, which is far from a bad thing in my book.

Like the massive Bentley, though, this is a luxury cruiser, not a proper sports car, right? Well, maybe the S3 lacks the sporting edge of the six-cylinder variants, but it grips and stops far better than they ever did in standard form.

'With the new suspension and tyres, it would probably out-corner the previous E-type,' wrote Bolster in '71, 'and would certainly out-brake it.' I'm not prepared to put such claims to the test in somebody else's beautifully preserved car, but at sensible speeds the Series 3 does all that you ask of it with commendable ease. It seems a strange paradox, then, that today people are happy to plough huge sums into upgrading earlier cars when Jaguar has already done just that for them. Could it be prejudice against the V12 engine's prodigious thirst and complexity that puts them off?

"When I bought mine," says Alan, "I knew that the fuel consumption would not be as good

SPECIALIST'S VIEW* NOW IS THE TIME

"The market for the S3 is on the up," says Marcus Holland of E-type UK, which provided the featured car. "They provide a lovely driving experience, and the price can be very attractive. Manual roadsters are the most sought-after, but the auto is not bad; it's the only E-type in which we think it works. You'd be looking at £90-135,000 for a nice roadster, with average cars costing £60-80,000 and projects £25-40k. Fixed-heads are £15-25k for a project, £30-50k average and £60-95k for the best. A full rebuild is about £100,000.

"V12s tend to be bought by enthusiasts who understand the greater usability. Upgrading to the latest ignition systems is popular, as are an electronic fuel pump and injection (using XJ-S hardware, plus a modern ECU and coil packs). The result is improved economy (20mpg) and far cleaner running, plus the elimination of hot-starting issues.

"The most important aspect is the condition of the monocoque, and getting an engine inspection is always a good idea. Cylinder heads and cooling systems can be a problem on more infrequently used or poorly maintained examples, but they are reliable once rectified. Around £1000 per year should cover a full service and sorting the inevitable niggles. An S3 will drive terribly if the suspension bushes are shot, but it's a relatively cheap fix."

*PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

'The unassailable punch of this most magnificent of engines surely makes up for its prodigious thirst'



as my Series 2, but with that car averaging only 19-20mpg, I was more than prepared for a lesser figure. As for the complexity of the V12, this was not a worry because it was only an engine, albeit with 12 rather than six cylinders, and four carburettors in place of three. The S3 made for reliable transport as a daily driver, although it did turn out to be more expensive than expected, with fuel consumption in stop-start driving dropping as low as 9mpg. That said, on a recent 700-mile run to Edinburgh, the elderly Jaguar returned its best-ever figure of 18.25mpg. Fortunately, during the Fuel Crisis of 1973-'74, I was deemed to be an 'essential car user' so I could get coupons, but being limited to only five gallons at a time meant you had to visit one garage after another, sitting in a 50-yard queue each time."

That Fuel Crisis, inevitably, did the E-type no favours. In 1973, shortly before the OPEC embargo sent prices spiralling, *Autocar* had observed that the S3's 18-gallon fuel tank could be emptied after less than three hours' driving – and that replenishing it would cost a heady £7! Almost overnight, however, that figure doubled. From S3s being much in demand and

in some cases changing hands for over list price, finding homes for unsold cars suddenly became a whole new challenge. "In 1971-'72, it wasn't perceived as being a particularly thirsty car," says Trevor Wooding of Hurst Park Automobiles, which specialised in low-mileage Jaguars at the time. "When you think of what an Austin 3 Litre or Vauxhall Viscount would have given you, it wasn't all that bad, and people really wanted them because it was vastly improved compared to the six-cylinder models. But then from 1973-'74, fuel consumption suddenly became an issue. Like all big cars, they became very hard to sell." Tellingly, Trevor's keeper is a lovely silver S3.

Today a tank of fuel will cost a whole lot more, but unless you're planning to rack up a huge annual mileage, does it really matter? The unassailable punch of this most magnificent of engines surely makes up for it. And unless race-car dynamics are your thing, I doubt you will ever find an S3 disappointing on the road.

"It was a good car," says Norman. "We didn't have a very big budget – Lyons always kept a tight hold on spending – but nor was it a very difficult project. We modified the subframe

and had to concentrate on damper settings, ride height, front-wheel camber and suchlike, although it worked very well from the outset. It was more sophisticated and more comfortable than the earlier versions of the E-type. It was the right car for our market at that time."

In today's investor-fuelled environment, it's a sentiment that resonates strongly with me. As much as I love the V12's six-cylinder forebears, would I pay vastly more than an S3 to own one? I enjoy this car's slightly louche, leftfield appeal. It is a less obvious choice, and a far better car than most people would have you believe. It's also a comparative bargain. "I'd never return to a Series 1 or 2," concludes Alan, "and I would recommend only the S3 to a potential purchaser. No other car matches the charisma of the V12, and I would never sell mine, whatever the offer."

Thanks to Trevor Wooding at Hurst Park Automobiles (07831 427380; hurstpark.co.uk); E-type UK (01732 852762; etypeuk.com); John Marton; Alan Hames. This feature was first published in the May 2016 of C&SC. Norman Dewis sadly passed away in June 2019, at the age of 98



Clockwise: updated styling has more muscular stance than previous E-types, mainly thanks to flared wheelarches; exposed headlights on the shapely nose; famous emblem on XJ6-inspired grille; badging confirms engine's pedigree



V12 grips and rides well, despite softer set-up than earlier cars. It's a pleasing machine to pilot along fast, sweeping A-roads

THE RIVALS

CHEVROLET CORVETTE C3

If the V12 E-type was conceived primarily for the US market, the 'Vette was its most obvious homegrown American rival – and the only one that came close on price. Loud and brash compared with the Jaguar, the futuristic styling of its glassfibre body made



the E-type look dated. The big-block 7.4-litre V8 could match the Coventry car's performance, but not its refinement.

FERRARI 365GTC/4

'Affordable' Daytona sibling had a quad-cam 4390cc V12 that made 340bhp and 312lb ft. It was good for 0-60mph in 6.5 secs and a 163mph top speed, but the engine needed plenty of revs before delivering the goods. Understated and underrated, it cost three



times as much as the E-type when it was new – and it still does now.

LAMBORGHINI JARAMA

A remarkably capable machine, providing a decent compromise between sports-car fun and GT refinement, coupled with a supple ride. The 3.9-litre V12 produced a whopping 365bhp at a heady 7500rpm and 300lb ft at 5500rpm, yet it was more flexible than those



figures suggest. Built in minuscule numbers (just 327 examples in all) and fiercely expensive, they're now super-rare.

MASERATI GHIBLI

Unveiled at Turin in 1966, the Ghibli featured an all-alloy, quad-cam, dry-sump 4.7-litre V8 boasting 306bhp (335bhp in the 4.9 SS) and stonking pace. But this mightiest of Maseratis made do with a seemingly archaic live rear



axle and had an eye-watering price-tag. A Spyder followed from 1969, while greater practicality was provided by its 2+2 sibling, the Indy.

MERCEDES-BENZ 450SL & SLC

Mass-produced sophisticate came in open and long-wheelbase closed guises. Better made and more practical than the Jaguar, but lacking the sex appeal. They turn few heads in this company, plus they are a touch dull to



drive, but utterly dependable. Unburstable V8 engines offered the lowliest performance here, but 136mph was far from shabby.

DOUBLE

Two cars, each carrying two great automotive names. Controversial when new, they became the unsung sports car bargains of their era

WORDS **ANDREW NOAKES** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



DEALING



Cracking the American market has long been the key to success for a sports car. Doing so virtually guarantees a profitable production run, so the list of sports cars designed with Americans in mind is a long and illustrious one. By the end of the '60s, Porsche and Jensen both planned to add cars to that list, and both would do so in conjunction with another well-known name. In design and detail, few sports cars are more conspicuously of their era and, although the two companies' approaches were quite different, their products' fortunes have followed similar paths, leaving them largely – and unjustly – unloved by later generations.

Oddly, it is the elder car that shows more modern thinking. Volkswagen and Porsche have always been closely linked, with the latter contributing engineering know-how and the former supplying cheap componentry for Porsche's early models. When the six-cylinder 911 of 1963 took it upmarket, the need for a cheaper car was obvious. But even the four-cylinder 912, which quickly became the most popular model, was twice the price of the MGs and Triumphs that were snapped up by eager US buyers. Porsche needed to build bigger volumes, but Zuffenhausen lacked capacity.

Volkswagen supremo Heinz Nordoff, meanwhile, was wrestling with the problem of the slow-selling Type 34 Karmann Ghia coupé. Nordoff and Ferry Porsche were old friends, and a solution to both companies' problems soon emerged. Porsche would design a new

VW sports car, to be assembled at Wolfsburg with bodies built by Karmann at Osnabrück. Porsche could then buy bodies from Karmann at cost, fit its own engines and create a cut-price new model. Nordoff and Porsche shook hands on the deal, and the work began.

Mid-engined machinery was taking over in sports-car racing – led by Porsche's own 904 – so the Volkswagen 411 engine of the new 914 would be mounted ahead of the rear axle line. Suspension would be by 911-style struts and torsion bars at the front, coils and trailing arms at the back. Both companies wanted the new car to be distinct from their existing ranges, so the styling was by an outside consultant, Gugelot Design at Neu-Ulm. Hans Gugelot's credits included Braun razors and the Kodak Carousel slide projector, but no cars, so Butzi Porsche kept a close eye on the project.

Much of the deal between the two companies was no more than a verbal agreement between Ferry Porsche and Heinz Nordoff – and verbal agreements aren't worth the paper they're written on. So when Nordoff died, the new man at the top, Kurt Lotz, had no interest in building sports cars and certainly not in helping Porsche build its sports cars. Lotz would not allow the Karmann bodies to be sold at cost: instead, he applied VW's system of charging tooling costs based on production volume. Because Porsche planned to take what, in VW terms, were small numbers, the system made them more expensive than the 911 shells from Karmann.

Even so, the new car was launched at the Frankfurt show in 1969. In Europe the targa-topped two seater was sold as a VW-Porsche at

JENSEN-HEALEY BOB HEYDON

Bob Heydon grew up in Walsall, and his school provided an excellent education in British specialist cars: it was on one of the test routes from the Jensen factory at West Bromwich. Bob fell in love with the marque, and the first car he owned was a Jensen-Healey. This is his fourth. "It was sold as 'mechanically sound'," he explains. "Body-wise it was dreadful – the only decent panel was the bonnet. The inner and outer sills were completely shot, and all that was holding the car together was the transmission tunnel."



Bob rebuilt the body, but stuck with the original motor until the oil pump seized at speed on the M40. A good secondhand unit was dropped in to replace it – a much cheaper option than a rebuild, even though engine parts are easily available: "You can walk into Lotus dealers and get most things." Bigger Dell'Orto 45DHLA carburettors, as used on '70s Lotus models, take the power to 160bhp provided you keep your foot down. "They like to be revved," Bob says.

VW-PORSCHE 914SC

Sold/number built 1969-'75/118,900 (all)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, ohv 1971cc flat-four, Bosch electronic fuel injection

Max power 100bhp (DIN) @ 5000rpm

Max torque 116lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by struts, torsion bars, anti-roll bar **rear** semi-trailing arms, coils springs, telescopic dampers

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 13ft 1in (3987mm)

Width 5ft 5½in (1664mm)

Height 4ft (1219mm)

Wheelbase 8ft ½in (2451mm)

Weight 2117lb (961kg)

0-60mph 8.8 secs

Top speed 115mph **Mpg** 26

Price new £2798.85 (1972)



King of cornering: 914 is cold, but lithe handling and sharp steering make it the cross-country champion





Straight-line winner: the Jensen-Healey easily outrags the Porsche 914, even in six-cylinder guise



JENSEN-HEALEY

Sold/number built 1972-'76/10,503

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, dohc 1973cc 'four', twin Dell'Orto 40DHLA carburettors (45DHLAs on this car)

Max power 140bhp (DIN) @ 6500rpm (160bhp on this car)

Max torque 130lb ft @ 5000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by upper wishbones, transverse links, reaction arms
rear four-link live axle; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 13ft 6in (4115mm)

Width 5ft 3¼in (1606mm)

Height 4ft ¼in (1225mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 8¼in (2343mm)

Weight 2094lb (950kg)

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 120mph **Mpg** 24

Price new £1810 (1972)

VW-PORSCHE 914 KEVIN CLARKE

Kevin Clarke has owned 914s since 1990, but this one has only been on the fleet a few months. "I was looking for a 2-litre that hadn't been extensively modified," he says. Many 914s in the UK are US imports; Kevin wanted a UK car, but most were killed off by rust. "This one was restored back in the 1980s," he says. "The lady who sold it loved the car." It has the optional Comfort and Sports packages, meaning alloys, front and rear anti-roll bars, driving lights, a centre console – about the only options missing are the chromed bumper casings.



Engine access looks tricky until you realise that it's designed to be serviced from underneath: major jobs are done after removing the motor, but that's pretty straightforward. Service parts are common with other Porsches and Volkswagens, but some body panels are hard to get hold of new. "They are still plentiful secondhand," says Kevin. "There are specialists in America, and Mittelmotor in Germany."

Lotz's insistence, while in the USA it was known only as a Porsche. Two versions were available: the 914/4 with the 80bhp, 1679cc VW Type 4 engine, and the 914/6 with the mildest of Porsche's 2-litre flat-sixes, making 110bhp. The 914/6 lasted only until '72, when it was replaced by a four-cylinder car (sometimes referred to as the 914SC) fitted with a 2-litre version of the VW engine developing 100bhp. Porsche said it offered much of the performance of the 914/6 but at a lower cost – and it was cost that was always the 914's bugbear.

In the USA, where the car was marketed as an entry-level Porsche, price mattered less and the 914 sold reasonably well – despite mutters that it wasn't a 'real Porsche' – but in Europe the insistence on VW-Porsche badging backfired. Buyers expected low prices, yet a 914/6 cost over £3400 – more than a V12 E-type, and the cheaper 914/4 was considerably slower. The 914SC went on sale at £2800, but if you wanted right-hand drive, converter Crayford would lighten your bank account by a further £600.

The notably quicker Jensen-Healey, which also made its debut in 1972, was just £1826. Jensen had built bodies for Donald Healey's successful line of Austin-Healeys from the start, in 1953. The Big Healeys were a major export success into the 1960s, but new BMC chairman George Harriman was unhappy with the royalties being paid to Healey on every car sold. Why pay to use Healey's name, he reasoned, when the MG marque was part of BMC? Harriman ended production of the Big Healey (in effect replacing it with the

MGC), and by 1971 the smaller Austin-Healey Sprite had become simply an Austin Sprite.

Austin-Healey was the best-selling marque in importer extraordinaire Kjell Qvale's roster of great British names that included MG and Jaguar. So when the Healey family started work on a new sports car, Qvale was interested. Jensen, meanwhile, was struggling: rather than look elsewhere for production facilities, Qvale simply bought Jensen and installed Donald Healey as chairman. Like the Healeys' previous projects, the car had a bespoke body (a steel monocoque, with bolt-on outer panels) but drew heavily on existing engineering. In-house styling efforts failed to make the grade, so the Healeys called on William Towns, who had recently turned freelance after a spell at Aston Martin where he penned the DBS. The shape Towns produced for the new 'Jensen-Healey' had a hint of TR6 at the back and a touch of the Europa's low bonnet line at the front.

A compact engine was essential. Ford's 2.6-litre Cologne V6 was one contender, Vauxhall's 2.3-litre slant-four another, and BMW was consulted about the fuel-injected 'four' from the 2002tii. Then Lotus boss Colin Chapman revealed his own 16-valve slant-four, using the Vauxhall's crankshaft. It was an attractive option: cheaper and more powerful, with an efficient new twin-cam cylinder head that promoted very clean combustion, so it could pass Federal emissions regulations. The only problem was one of timing: it was still under development, but Qvale was keen to get the Healey into production.

It was announced in 1972, but almost immediately there were problems. The Lotus engines were loath to retain oil, and they failed to start if the car was parked on a hill because fuel drained from the carburettor bowls. Worse still, Jensen-Healeys soon gained a reputation for corrosion. "It wasn't unheard of for them to be rotten within 12 months," says Bob Heydon, owner and restorer of this bright-yellow Jensen-Healey. "They would be going back to the factory within the warranty because of problems with the bodywork." These unforeseen costs helped hasten Jensen's demise in the summer of 1976.

By then the Jensen-Healey had been heavily revised. The engine problems were sorted, and minor exterior and interior changes tidied up the appearance for the Mk2 of 1973. The following year, the four-speed Sunbeam Rapier H120 gearbox was replaced by a five-speed Getrag, and US-market 5mph impact bumpers were added. Sales remained slow, hampered by a reputation for unreliability that never left the Jensen-Healey, and by styling that was neat but rather pedestrian for a sports car in an age of dramatic flying wedges. The Healeys departed and refused to allow their name to appear on a short-lived two-plus-two estate version, the Jensen GT. All told, just over 10,000 examples had been made by the time the factory closed in the summer of 1976.

Bob Heydon's Mk1 is one of about 100 Jensen-Healeys on the road in Britain. It's pretty, particularly in this colour, but you can see why early '70s buyers might have thought it looked staid. Technically it's a bit old-fashioned, too, with a conventional front-engine, rear-wheel-drive layout and a live rear axle. Only the multi-valve engine raises the stakes. It raises the noise level, too. Even at idle you are made aware of the engine's potential, and while cruising along the insistent exhaust note never diminishes, so it's no wonder that later cars were given improved sound insulation. The Lotus engine pays you back with surprising mid-range urge and never runs out of steam,

even at the 7000rpm redline. For a big in-line 'four' of this vintage, it's amazingly capable.

So is the rest of the Jensen-Healey. It rides broken Tarmac with aplomb and tackles corners keenly, although the steering could be swifter and mid-corner bumps can throw the four-linked beam axle off line. As compromises go, however, it is well thought out: sufficient sharpness to entertain the keen driver, enough comfort to cosset the less committed.

By way of contrast, the 914 demands more dedication straight away. Getting into it is challenging because the seat is low, the sill tall and the doors shallow, although wide. The big steering wheel and raked 'screen don't help. Once you are installed, the plain cabin feels roomier than the Healey, with considerably more width although perhaps a fraction less longitudinal space for the long of leg. The fuel-injected engine fires easily and idles with a Beetle-like beat, but its forceful top-end response is quite a surprise. The soundtrack might be nothing special, but the four-cylinder 914 delivers worthwhile performance, even if it's not quite in the Jensen-Healey's league. It works well on cursive roads, too. The steering is super-light and writhes, 911-like, in your hands to provide excellent feedback. Only the heavy, unresponsive brakes and long-travel clutch spoil the picture.

Choosing between them is tricky. Although both cars were aimed at the same marketplace, they went about their work in very different ways. The Jensen-Healey has a classic layout and marginally the more inviting cabin, and it sounds like a sports car – and performs like one. The Porsche is colder and more efficient. It leaves the Healey behind on a twisty road, but would struggle to keep up – even in six-cylinder guise – along the straights. Whichever you choose, driving it will be far more fun than its reputation suggests.

Thanks to David Booth, Jensen-Healey registrar for the Jensen Owners' Club (joc.org.uk); Bruce Manning, Porsche Club GB (porscheclubgb.com)

THAT '70s SHOW

LOTUS EUROPA SPECIAL

1969-'75, 9230 built (all), 1558cc 'four', 126bhp, 113lb ft, 0-60mph 6.6 secs, 125mph, 33mpg, Price new £2720 ('72)

The Europa with the 'big-valve' Twin Cam has great performance, race-car



grip and handling, and a cossetting ride. But an Elan did as much when they were new, for less money.

MARCOS 3-LITRE GT

1969-'71, 80 built, 2994cc V6, 136bhp, 192lb ft, 0-60mph 7.8 secs, 125mph, 21mpg, Price new £2405 ('69)

Wiltshire's knee-high sports car, with a tubular chassis and Ford's Essex V6 power (it was also available with the



Volvo straight-six or Ford 2-litre V4). Capable, characterful and likeable, but exceedingly rare.

TVR 3000M

1972-'79, 654 built (coupés), 2994cc V6, 138bhp, 174lb ft, 0-60mph 7.7 secs, 121mph, 24mpg, Price new £2690 ('74)

The staple product of incoming TVR boss Martin Lilley's period featured a new chassis with a body descended from the Vixen/Tuscan era, and the



Ford Essex V6 providing motive power. Tough and quick, plus there were 250-plus convertibles.

ALFA ROMEO 2000 SPIDER VELOCE

1970-'78, 29,317 built, 1962cc 'four', 131bhp, 134lb ft, 0-60mph 8.9 secs, 115mph, 27mpg, Price new £2949 ('73)

The long-running Alfa sports car began life as the boat-tailed Duetto in 1966, but the definitive Kamm-tail arrived



in 1970 and the 2-litre twin-cam a year later. Crammed with character, but watch for rust.

TRIUMPH TR6

1969-'76, 94,619 built, 2498cc 'six', 152bhp, 159lb ft, 0-60mph 8.5 secs, 117mph, 28mpg, Price new £1441 ('69)

The last of the old-school British roadster breed belies its 'brute force and ignorance' image with fuel injection

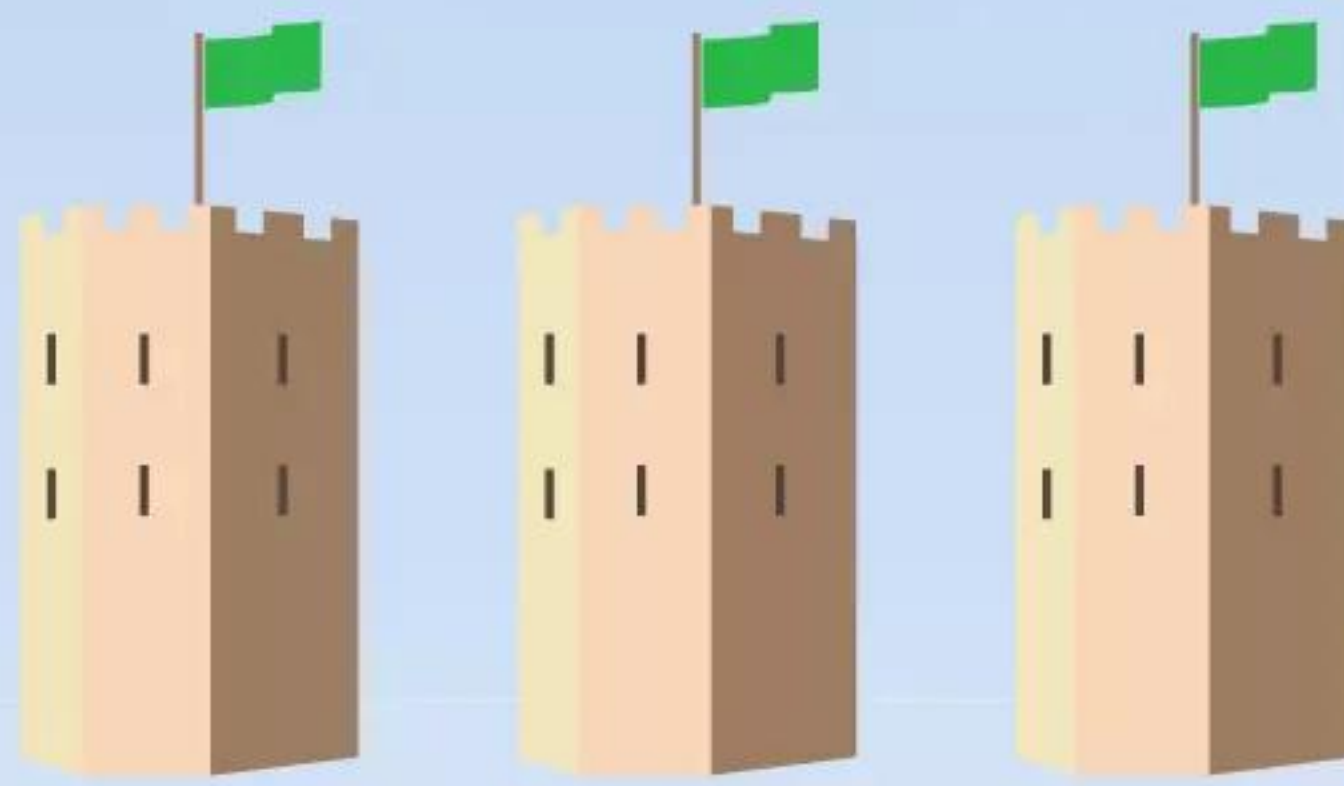


and independent rear suspension. Not as pretty as the TR5, but looks a true bargain in comparison.



Fresh from the Aston Martin DBS, William Towns was behind the Jensen-Healey's lines; the 914 was Hans Gugelot's first attempt at car styling

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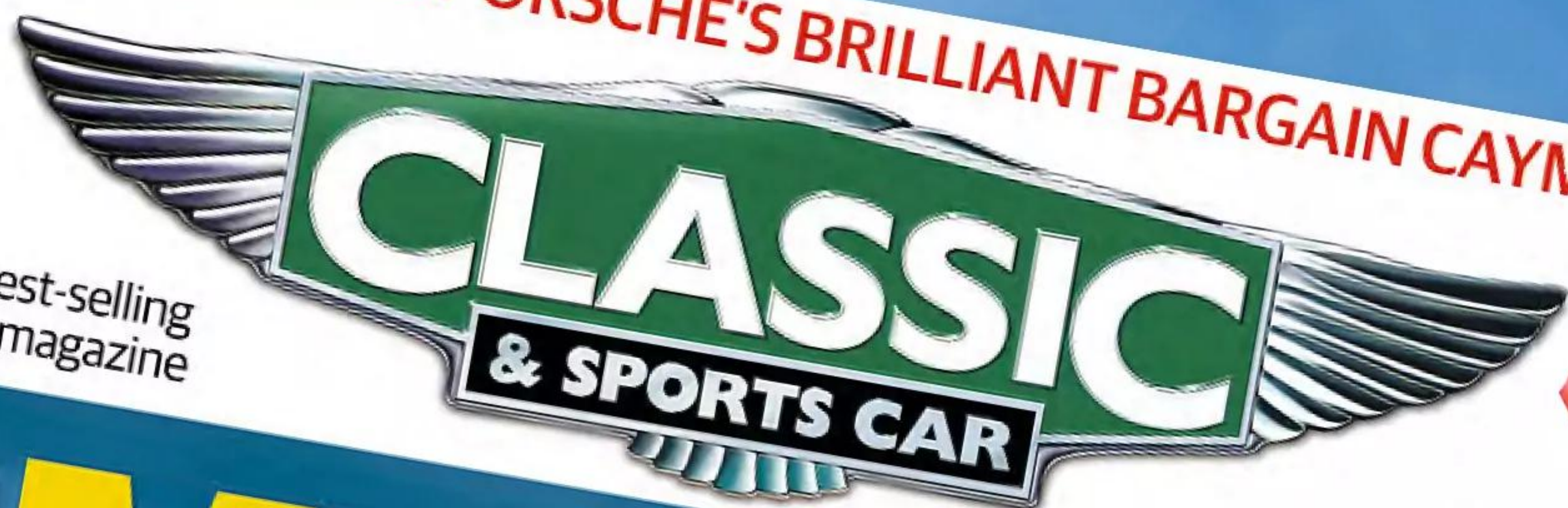


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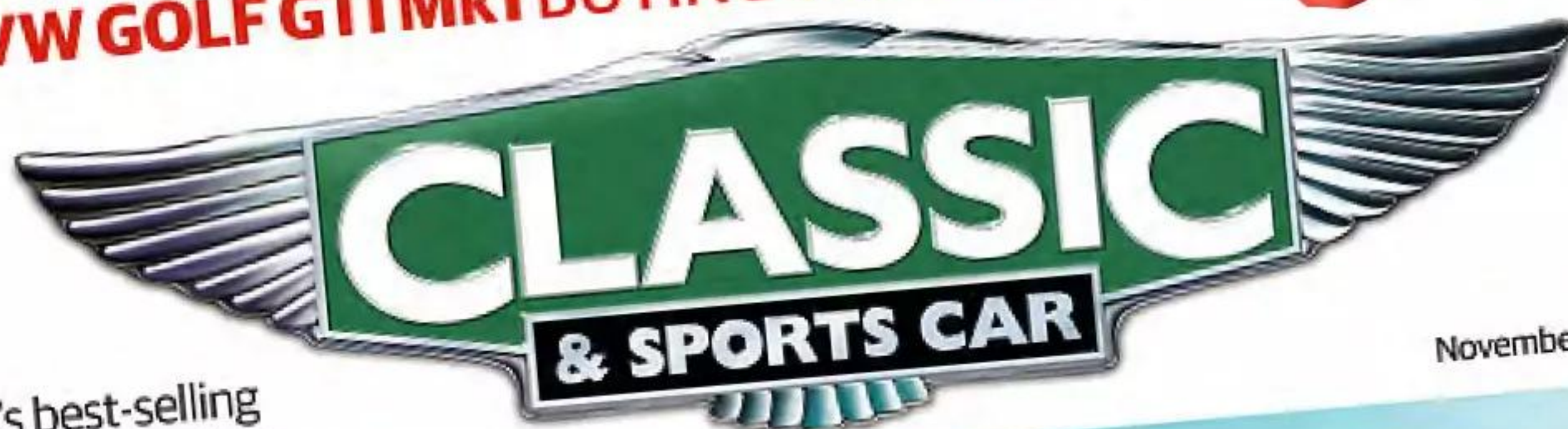
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When sports s ruled the v

The front-wheel-drive new kids on the block didn't have it all their own way in the mid-'70s, as these three brilliant sporting icons from Ford, Hillman and Vauxhall prove

WORDS **SIMON CHARLESWORTH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



saloons world





Clockwise: funky Avenger Tiger set the template for the early-'70s sports saloon; magnesium Minilites; go-faster stripes and a famous Rootes name revived; only a plain speedometer lets the side down



These snazzy classics stand out like bri-nylon sore thumbs. Not so much British takes on *berline sportivo*, these go-faster models are closer in spirit to their distant American cousins – miniaturised muscle cars that owe more than just developmental dollars to Uncle Sam, thanks to their gum-chewing bravado. Just don't pop the bonnet and start counting the cylinders, or you might be disappointed.

Hillman Avenger Tiger, Vauxhall HP Firenza and Ford Escort RS 2000 Mk2: these are name badges that resonate with enthusiasts. Pinned to affordable performance machines, they are a few of the many that beat the hot hatchback to its lauded blend of practicality, desirability and performance.

By the dusk of the 1960s, European sporting saloons were nothing new, but that didn't stop Britain's aftermarket tuning industry from booming. The flames were fanned by the rise of motorsport series that meant spectators could own the models that raced and rallied, fuelled by magazines such as *Cars & Car Conversions* –

or 'Triple C', as it was known. Come the '70s, manufacturers that didn't already offer such a model needed to – and PDQ.

These cars hit the showrooms throughout the decade and, yes, period market accuracy has been sacrificed so that we can indulge in the most extrovert of this cosmic species.

Reputedly the first 'world car' engineered using computer-aided design, the all-new Hillman Avenger was a 'Coke bottle' Rootes Group model that would not have happened without Chrysler funds – because the company had been mortally wounded by warring management and union militants.

The Tiger was sired by Des O'Dell, head of the legendary Chrysler Competitions Department. It was based on a works chase vehicle that impressed Chrysler UK's head, Don Lander, to such a degree that he sanctioned the production of 150 cars based on Supers. The model's role was to act as showroom bait, luring customers with a range of parts and accessories that could be fitted to lesser-striped Avengers and thus fund further motorsport activities.

Most Series 1 Tigers were registered as dealer demonstrators and subsequently used for

rallying, building on the successes of the GT. Sadly, today this means that few genuine S1s survived their ordeal by yumping, although Chrysler UK went on to assemble a further 400 productionised Series 2 Tigers, and it is rumoured that the company made an additional 50 S1s for retail.

Robert Nutter's car has a mere 22,503 miles on the clock. He caught the Tiger bug when, as an 18-year-old working for Charter's of Aldershot – a Rootes dealer – he got to drive the demonstrator. "I've heard that LPJ 147K is still around, tucked away somewhere," says Robert. "This car was off the road from late 1975 until 2003 – it went into storage when the offside front wing was damaged. It was repaired by apprentices before returning to the garage.

"The dealer – Poplar Garages of Billingshurst – owned this example until 2003, when the firm closed and everything was sold. Ken Ellis of the Avenger Sunbeam Owners' Club then purchased it and recommissioned it, and I bought it in '06. It is a very genuine car and by far the lowest-mileage one known to the club."

If Vauxhall was the first to bring Coke-bottle styling to Britain with the HB Viva, then it was



Supportive seats? Check. Chunky sports wheel? Check. Lots of gauges? Check. Note the dash-top rev-counter in the Tiger (top). Pedals set for heel-and-toe merchants? Of course!

also among the earliest to abandon the genre when the HB was rebodied as the HC in 1970. The new Viva was available in a number of body styles, and it was the Firenza coupé – Luton’s answer to the Ford Capri and Opel Manta – that was chosen to take up the mantle vacated by the 2-litre HB Viva GT. In 1973, the Firenza was overhauled to make the model more distinctive and desirable.

The High Performance Firenza, or HPF, came with fettled suspension, a Blydenstein Racing 2.3-litre overhead-cam slant-four (with a high-lift camshaft, a modified head, twin Strombergs and a tubular exhaust), a ZF five-speed gearbox and a heavy-duty live axle. But it was the stunning facelift that drew headlines. A low-drag ‘droop snoot’ glassfibre nose cone with four covered Cibie lights and integral spoiler, Avon Safety Wheels, colour-coded bumpers, blackened chrome and Silver Starfire paint totally transformed the Firenza.

Although unveiled in 1973 for £1995, it would not go on sale until 1974, priced at £2234.92. Frustrating a promising number of orders, production was held up by the Fuel Crisis and the three-day week, plus manufacturing and supplier problems at the Ellesmere Port plant. By mid-1975, the HPF had quietly disappeared from Vauxhall’s catalogue. Just 204 out of a planned run of 1000 were completed.

Dave Murrell bought his 10-month-old ex-demonstrator in July 1975 from Oxford’s City Motors and is proud of being the Droop Snoot Group’s member No 4. He recalls: “I remember glimpsing just a part of an HPF headlight in *Vauxhall Motorist* when I worked at Barnes of Wokingham, a Vauxhall dealer, and thinking, ‘Wow! That’s so futuristic.’ I had to have one.

‘Come the ‘70s, firms that didn’t offer a sports saloon needed to – and PDQ’

“The day after going to Silverstone to watch Gerry Marshall racing, I stopped off at Oxford. They had two, one brand new, the other their demonstrator. I spoke to them the next day and went over that weekend for a test drive. At the end of July 1975, I became the proud owner of GUD 8N, not thinking that I would still own it all these years later. And I still love driving it.”

By the dawn of the 1970s, Ford produced some of the most desirable affordable performance cars in Britain. The Mk2 Escort RS 2000 is the only sequel here. It was built to replace the Mk1 that had filled the gap in cost, performance and complexity between the RS Mexico and the mighty RS 1600. Aside from appearances, the big difference between the Mk1 and Mk2 of ’74 was that, unlike the original Ford of Britain Mk1, the crisper Mk2 was jointly developed with Ford of Germany. Curiously, it was both heavier and less aerodynamic than its predecessor.

Unlike the Mk1, the 1976 Mk2 RS 2000 was built in Germany following the closure of the Advanced Vehicle Operations plant in Aveley. The AVO team, though, still developed the model. It drew much of its trim level from the RS 1800 Custom, while it’s easy to see from



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Clockwise: 'droop snoot' HPF leans most but grips keenly; Avon Safety Wheels look cool in black; colour-coded bumpers and spoiler give a fresh appearance; full set of recessed dials includes oil pressure



where inspiration came for its polyurethane nosecone, boot-lip spoiler and black trim...

"I picked up *Classic Ford* when I was looking for magazines to take with me on holiday in 2000," recalls Andrew Parker. "I had not had anything to do with Fords for about 15 years. My first car was a Mk2 Escort and I thought, 'Cor! I never had an RS 2000.' At the time they were sensible money, and this was the first one that I went to look at."

"I bought the RS on a whim when it had done 107,000 miles. I'd had it a couple of years and couldn't sell the car. It was then that I decided to do something with it, so I had it restored. It has 32,305 miles on the clock – second time around! I'm the Escort's fourth owner; a bloke called Alan Hobbs had owned the Ford since 1984. It was stored in his garage and his wife told him that he had to get rid of it."

Despite the great differences in their ages, evolutions, appearances and mechanical specifications, these three are all great to drive.

The Tiger's bright dash is a mixture of '60s and '70s morsels tossed together with a few features that were ahead of their time. There's a strip-style speedometer, a pod-mounted rev

'If it had persisted with the Firenza, the Griffin might have regained its lustre'

counter (redlined at 6000rpm), deep Restall bucket seats, a drilled three-spoke steering wheel and robust column controls. On the outside, there is a rear spoiler (a European first), magnesium Minilites, bullet mirrors, competition spotlights, adjustable dampers, Sundance Yellow paint, decals and a macho power bulge. The 107bhp, overhead-valve 1498cc unit has a competition camshaft, big-valve cylinder head and twin Weber 40DCOE carburettors. Torque is linear from low revs, so, unlike many period go-faster machines, there isn't a noticeable point beyond 3000rpm when things start to get frisky.

The Tiger's fluid responses are quick, light and nimble – particularly the steering and turn-in. The four-speed gearbox is slick, too,

no doubt assisted by the all-iron engine's comparative lack of mass. Yet it never feels as if it would be left behind in the wake of the droop snoots. Indeed, the Tiger didn't just maul the Mexico in a sprint, it could match the 110bhp RS 2000's acceleration, too. Despite its competition roots, it also rides as well as the Firenza and rolls less, and it feels more responsive and enthusiastic than the Ford.

You drop down into the 1979 RS 2000 Custom's 'fishnet' Recaros and ahead, through the chunky RS three-spoke wheel, there is a five-dial binnacle with a 140mph speedo and a 7000rpm tachometer. Aesthetically, there isn't much to take in – aside from a 'Custom' badge in the middle of the dashboard. The Escort places function ahead of flamboyance – special RS 2000 features are limited to an oil-pressure gauge and clock.

The Ford counters the Tiger's talents with quicker, heavier steering and one of the great gearchanges of motordom – just a short jab and it chops across the H-gate. If the motorsport-bred RS 1800 yells and snarls like Yosemite Sam, the RS 2000 is far more cultured – an amicable Val Doonican, comfortable in its



Clockwise: Ford was a past master at making hot rods for the masses; Escort sports matt-black detailing and signature RS four-spoke rims; neat logo on steering-wheel boss; supremely clear set of instruments



roadgoing pullover of easy-listening refinement. Yet, if you ask it to get sweaty beyond familiar parameters, it does sound a bit strained and short of breath. This RS 2000 has been tweaked with the optional Ford Group One kit (twin Weber 44IDFs with a big-valve head), wider RS alloy wheels, lowered suspension and a Capri 2.8i five-speed gearbox, but this Signal Orange specimen remains true to its brief.

Drive an HP Firenza and you can't help but wonder if, had Vauxhall had persisted with these cars and others like them, perhaps the Griffin would have retained more of its pre-General Motors lustre. The redline is a shade over 6000rpm and, until enthusiastically encouraged by Dave, 4000rpm sounds like its natural limit – although the eager 2.3-litre slant-four will easily thrum to 5500rpm.

Sitting behind a racy dished wheel, the 131bhp Firenza's seven-clock dashboard with inverted tachometer might be as black as the RS 2000's, but with its grabhandle, two-tone seats and binnacle peppered with countersunk dials, it is more distinctive. As with the others here, the driving position is comfortable and straightforward; unlike the others, the Firenza

'Unlike the unisex hot hatch era, this lot are as blokey as Barry Sheene pulling birds'

has an organ-style throttle pedal and an original dog-leg five-speed ZF manual 'box – on top of which has to be the largest gearknob I've yet encountered: it looks as if it could hold a year's worth of Marmite.

The ZF has the slowest, longest and most weighty gearchange of the three – but that isn't a criticism, it's just the HPF's misfortune. The ratios really suit the muscular overhead-cam unit. The HPF leans further and there is greater bow weight in relation to the RS 2000, but this really is the utmost pedantry. The gearing of its manual steering, too, is well judged – its feedback sincere and full of substance.

Unlike a unisex hot hatch, these motors are as blokey as Barry Sheene pulling a bird or belching after a fry-up: tin-tops elevated from

commuter grind to the height of Brut-splashed sophistication by transformations that continue to stray in and out of fashion. Each is rich in torque and free from temperament.

Admittedly, none of these engines' vocals is especially emotive, but it is the car with the busy little pushrod unit that tugs particularly hard at the heart-strings. The underdog – or should that be 'undercat' – without the Gerry Marshall DTV wins or the mighty pull of Rallye Sport to draw upon, that should be more widely revered. It is the Avenger Tiger that feels the happiest when being zinged toward its redline. Belted into the low bucket with your bum in the carpet, it is the car that relishes the twists and turns; it is a saloon that refuses to compromise or dilute its stage-bred immediacy.

Given that it is the oldest offering with the smallest engine, from Britain's forgotten motoring giant, this is impressive. In fact, this product of the '70s can't resist saying: it's neat, real neat, I really love this Tiger's feat. 

Thanks to Droop Snoot Group (droopsnoot.co.uk); Rallye Sport Escorts (bbs.rallyesportescorts.co.uk); Avenger Sunbeam Owners' Club (asoc.co.uk)



FORD ESCORT RS 2000 CUSTOM

Sold/number built 1976-'80/c10,000

Engine all-iron, sohc 1993cc 'four', single Weber twin-choke carburettor

Max power 110bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 119lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, telescopic dampers

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 13ft ½in (3975mm)

Width 5ft 1¾in (1568mm)

Height 4ft 6¾in (1391mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 10½in (2400mm)

Weight 2015lb (914kg)

0-60mph 8.5 secs

Top speed 108mph **Mpg** 25

Price new £4515.73



HILLMAN AVENGER TIGER

Sold/number built 1972/c200

Engine all-iron, ohv 1498cc 'four', twin Weber carburettors

Max power 107bhp @ 6100rpm

Max torque 87lb ft @ 4500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, radius arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 13ft 5½in (4102mm)

Width 5ft 2½in (1588mm)

Height 4ft 7in (1397mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2in (2489mm)

Weight 1947lb (883kg)

0-60mph 8.4 secs

Top speed 110mph **Mpg** c27

Price new £1500



VAUXHALL HP FIRENZA

Sold/number built 1973-'75/204

Engine all-iron, sohc 2279cc slant-four, twin Stromberg carburettors

Max power 131bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 142lb ft @ 3600rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** four-link live axle; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 14ft 1½in (4305mm)

Width 5ft 4¾in (1645mm)

Height 4ft 3¾in (1314mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 1in (2464mm)

Weight 2238lb (1015kg)

0-60mph 7.5 secs

Top speed 120mph **Mpg** 25

Price new £2234.92



Vivid Signal Orange, Sundance Yellow and Silver Starmist - each one shows their true colours on the move, but it's the Avenger Tiger that comes to life most engagingly when let off the leash

The greatest saloon



ever made?

The much-lauded – and oft-maligned – NSU Ro80 broke with convention to rival cooler-headed saloons from Rover, BMW, Audi, Mercedes-Benz and Citroën

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



Finding rivals to pitch against the NSU Ro80 was always difficult, because there was nothing quite like it. Fast, refined and futuristically beautiful, it was not only powered by an exciting new kind of engine, but also so sorted and complete in all respects that it was hard to reconcile its all-round excellence with the firm that built it. After all, NSU of Neckarsulm came from a tradition of mopeds and rear-engined baby cars, not luxury tin-tops. Yet here it was tackling the establishment with a five-seat, four-door express that set new standards in every way. In many respected quarters, it was regarded as the world's best production saloon in the late '60s.

The infamous Wankel engine problems – and the traumatic fall from grace that ensued – was a story that did not gain momentum in the public eye until the early '70s. Before that, the Ro80 was a success story that garnered flattering reviews around the globe, so much so that its crowning as European Car of the Year in 1968 must have been a virtual formality.

We were as keen as everyone else in the UK. And yet, after the dust had settled on that spectacular 1967 debut, it was down to the

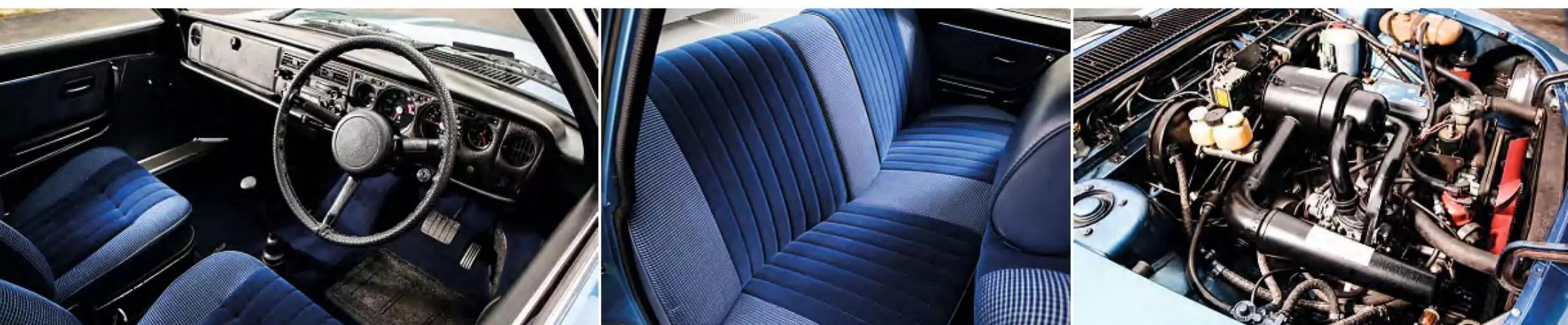
weekly *Motor* to publish the first cool-headed real-world comparison of this frankly amazing new car against its rivals on the British market. It was October 1968, and the first right-hand-drive Ro80s were on the way. The time had come to draw the battle lines between this upstart, rotary-powered machine and not only the West German competition from BMW and Mercedes-Benz, but also the large-engined traditional British luxury saloons (in the form of the Jaguar 420 and Rover 3.5 Litre) that came in the same £2000-2500 bracket.

It had been less than a year since the magazine had published its first ecstatic road test of an early production Ro80, driven in Italy, and the author of 'Group Test No 8' was no less enthusiastic: 'We again find it difficult to express the level of our admiration for a car which scores in so many ways over all others.' Four of *Motor's* five writers chose the Ro80 in the *Personal Choice* sequel published the following week. Roger Bell (nylon rally jacket and pointy shoes) called it 'one of the world's great cars', while technical editor Tony Curtis (drainpipe trousers, tweed sports coat) declared the NSU 'a vehicle worthy of the space age'. It is my most often revisited Ro80 feature, authoritatively written and photographed in

a way that gives an exciting sense of these saloons being thrown around 'on test' in a grey Northumbrian landscape, fording streams and raising dust as they diced on their doorhandles.

As well as being an elegant example of journalism, it was an enlightening and honest assessment in a form still quite young in the world of motoring magazines. Comparing cars head to head had, until the mid-'60s, been seen as not quite cricket by many manufacturers. The NSU was born into a new, more openly critical environment, and words were not minced in that 1968 group test about the surprising failings of the 'wallowy' Jaguar, which, for all its 4.2 litres, was no faster than the BMW 2000. That said, the Browns Lane press office could justifiably have pointed out that the 420 was about to be given the chop in favour of the XJ6. A back-to-back with that model a year down the line might have resulted in a different outcome for the NSU.

Recreating this classic comparison 50 years on, we decided to let the Rover keep the British end up and take a wider view of the Continental alternatives from Citroën and Audi, plus BMW and Mercedes-Benz. It was curious that *Motor* avoided the DS, because the model had always been the NSU's most obvious rival, created



Clockwise: exquisite Ro80 lines still look fresh more than 50 years later; NSU has the most modern dash design, with recessed gauges in padded fascia; really roomy cabin; two-rotor Wankel thrives on revs, but is thirsty



NSU Ro80

Sold/number built 1967-'77/37,402

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, twin-rotor 995cc Wankel, two twin-choke Solex carburettors

Max power 113.5bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 117lb ft @ 4500rpm

Transmission three-speed semi-automatic with torque converter, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** semi-trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Steering ZF power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 8¼in (4782mm)

Width 5ft 9¾in (1772mm)

Height 4ft 8in (1422mm)

Wheelbase 9ft 4½in (2858mm)

Weight 2632lb (1196kg)

0-60mph 12.6 secs

Top speed 113mph **Mpg** 15-23

Price new £2444 (1970)



Clockwise: DS glides effortlessly over pretty much any surface; aged four-pot nonetheless gives excellent performance with fuel injection; signature *cornet de frites* indicator; sumptuous front armchairs



more than a decade earlier but in a similar spirit of clean-sheet technical purity. The *Déesse* was an aerodynamic, front-driven five-seater designed to cover long distances with absolute stability and comfort.

In theory, a late-'60s DS21 would have been the nearest rival from the Citroën range when the Ro80 appeared. Not to worry: John Gagen's DS23 EFI is a good substitute that even trumps the NSU in its use of electronic fuel injection (which the Ro never had) and leather seats; big squishy armchairs quite unlike anything else.

In fact, so much about the Citroën is still amazing. Possibly cars such as the XJ6 and NSU were beginning to approach – or perhaps even exceed – the standards set by its gas-and-liquid, self-levelling suspension, though even now it impresses with its ability to soak up everything. It leaves you feeling totally cosseted.

By offering a four-speed manual (or even a conventional auto) on the late DS, Citroën was maybe admitting that the world had moved on from its original clutchless semi-auto. Not everyone gets on with them, but once mastered they are satisfying and intrinsic to the charm of the car as you move the finger-tip lever, learning to feather the throttle slightly between upshifts to keep it all fluid. The pin-sharp

brakes and sensitive powered steering require similar acclimatisation, but again, once learnt, it is easy to see how this acquired taste could become an addiction. If the engine sounds harsh and undistinguished, it does at least have lusty torque on its side so you can get along well without ever having to extend the motor.

The West German approach – at least as far as the BMW, Audi and Mercedes are concerned – is quite different. It is a graphic reminder that these vehicles come from an era when national identity was as clearly defined in our cars as it was in our food, architecture and anything else.

The crisp, boxy Audi 100 in particular is as coldly rational as the Citroën is romantic. It is a thoroughly competent design that, in many ways, established the tone for all Audis to follow. It impresses you with its finish, efficiency and fine overall behaviour, rather than seducing you with its looks or driver appeal. This example, kindly furnished by Audi's historic fleet in the UK, is an oddity in that it is a two-door right-hooker; most 100s sold in the British market had four doors.

In both guises, this was a clean-looking shape. Its handsome greenhouse treatment and neat tail-light design appear to reflect something from Mercedes' interest in the firm

CITROËN DS23 EFI PALLAS

Sold/number built 1955-'75/1,455,746 (all)

Construction steel monocoque, with steel, glassfibre and aluminium panels

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohv 2347cc 'four', Bosch D-Jetronic fuel injection

Max power 130bhp @ 5250rpm

Max torque 144lb ft @ 2500rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, four-speed semi-automatic or Borg-Warner three-speed automatic, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by twin leading arms **rear** trailing arms; hydropneumatic units, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering powered rack and pinion

Brakes powered discs front, drums rear

Length 15ft 11½in (4864mm)

Width 5ft 11in (1803mm)

Height 4ft 10in (1473mm)

Wheelbase 10ft 3in (3124mm)

Weight 2948lb (1337kg)

0-60mph 10.4 secs

Top speed 119mph **Mpg** 20-25

Price new £2883



Clockwise: attractive but understated 100 styling set the Audi template for years to come; slant-four reflects M-B's involvement with the design; gear schematic and clock; comfortable, elegant cabin is beautifully made



in the first half of the '60s. The engine, derived from the Super 90 and Auto Union – Audi's first post-war four-stroke – is unquestionably Mercedes-Benz in origin. It pulls the Audi along energetically, if not that smoothly or sweetly. Good economy and the ability to cruise this substantial car indefinitely at 100mph (on the *autobahn*) on less than 1800cc were its chief selling points. It is not over-burdened with low-end torque or high-revving refinement, but it delivers the goods well enough.

There were automatic 100s, but the four-speed manual works smoothly with a slightly remote feel. Despite having this canted-over, high-compression in-line 'four' slung well beyond the front wheels, the Audi is far from being an understeering pig – although power assistance would make it less clumsy at low speeds – plus it corners and rides with a lack of drama that leaves you impressed but unmoved, which was clearly its designers' intention.

Inside, the inviting seats and handsome fascia show how the West Germans were leading the way in the use of high-quality materials – the only ergonomic crime is its curiously offset pedals. It is pretty spacious, with rear legroom second only to the NSU, if nowhere near the DS. It was, in fairness,

cheaper than both of those and really for the buyer seeking prestigious German transport that was a cut above the rabble. A machine, in other words, to express discriminating taste without implying that you had won the pools.

That tended to be most people's reaction to any new Mercedes-Benz to reach British roads in the 1960s and early '70s, such was the general lack of understanding in the UK of the marque's model structure and hierarchy. Which brings us neatly to Tex Crampin's low-mileage 230/4, a late species of the W114/5 'New Generation' saloon powered by an oversquare 2307cc version of the firm's long-running, overhead-cam four-cylinder engine. You could have had 230 and 250 single-cam straight-sixes in this bodyshell (and the beefy 280 twin-cam), but *Motor* tried the first of the 220s (at £2297) and thought highly of it. Michael Bowler marginally preferred it to the Ro80, in fact.

'The Audi was for the buyer seeking German transport that was a cut above the rabble'

AUDI 100LS

Sold/number built 1968-'76/796,787

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohv 1871cc slant-four, single/twin Solex carburettors

Max power 112bhp @ 5600rpm

Max torque 118lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones **rear** beam axle, trailing arms, Panhard rod; coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 15ft ¾in (4590mm)

Width 5ft 8in (1730mm)

Height 4ft 7½in (1420mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 9¼in (2675mm)

Weight 2315lb (1050kg)

0-60mph 10.8 secs

Top speed 112mph **Mpg** 24-30

Price new £1995

The vertical headlights linked it to the W108s, but the 230/4 was subjected to styling tweaks to align the six-year-old body with the younger W116 S-Class. Here was a car that cost a bit more than an XJ6 yet would barely top 100mph.

In this company, 'our' immaculate W115 appears to be stripped of all but the bare essentials: power steering and an automatic transmission both cost extra, and you didn't even get a rev counter. Certainly, its light, airy interior is well made, but also a little bleak and joyless. The undoubted efficiency of boring (but essential) things such as ventilation is, perhaps, lost on those who have never bought into the Mercedes ethos. Urged through the four ratios in its sloppy, uninspiring manual gearbox, the 230/4 gathers pace with ponderous tenacity. There is not a lot of point in pushing it hard, although the chassis has enough suppleness and poise to deal with double the power. The semi-trailing-arm rear suspension was one of the main assets of the W114/5 series. It rides and handles with much of the aplomb of its more familiar successor, the W123.

What that slightly downbeat analysis doesn't account for is the superb finish and inherent strength of the Mercedes, and its potential to run up huge mileages without major issues. It

sold to those wanting a long-term investment in engineering rather than a short-term thrill-machine. If you wanted to drive to Afghanistan, this would have been the car for you.

The BMW was always more of an enthusiast's car and basically the model that introduced British buyers to the marque 60-odd years ago, opening the door to the success of the '02 range and the E3 straight-sixes. These early four-door, four-cylinder BMWs have been a touch neglected over the decades, so Paul Hill's delightful 2000 automatic is a rare and now much-coveted *Neue Klasse* survivor.

To modern eyes, you can see how the boxy shape could almost be mistaken for something Eastern European, but the detailing and nicely worked out (if not lavish) interior tell you this is a BMW. From your vantage point you can see all the corners, and you soon realise that you *do* need that big wheel when parking. On the move, the steering's delightful precision is at the heart of the appeal, and the BMW soon lets you know it wants to be driven fast and well.

Motor took a twin-carb, four-speed manual Ti Lux to Northumbria in 1968, but the 2000 automatic with a single carburettor and ZF three-speed gearbox was popular in the UK. These early BMWs are perhaps unique in the

MERCEDES-BENZ 230/4

Sold/number built 1968-'76/221,783 (including 230/6)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc 2307cc 'four', single Stromberg 175CDT carburettor

Max power 109bhp @ 4800rpm

Max torque 137lb ft @ 2500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual or four-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones **rear** semi-trailing arms; coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 4¼in (4680mm)

Width 5ft 9¾in (1770mm)

Height 4ft 8¾in (1440mm)

Wheelbase 9ft ¼in (2750mm)

Weight 2977lb (1350kg)

0-60mph c13 secs

Top speed 106mph **Mpg** 23-27

Price new £3495 (250)



Clockwise: 'New Generation' Merc is now well into its middle age; firm seats, massive wheel and basic dash - not even a rev counter - but it's superb quality; trademark three-pointed star; four-pot is fed by a single Stromberg carburettor





Clockwise: rare factory black suits sporty, late-model *Neue Klasse* 2000 – the smallest car in this group; two-tone vinyl livens interior; ZF auto 'box still gives lively performance; single-carb slant-four makes 100bhp



world of four-pot 1960s/'70s saloons in that the slushbox option doesn't destroy the engine's urge. They showed people that good performance and decent fuel economy were not mutually exclusive, and that refinement didn't have to equal weight and clumsiness.

The soft engine mountings, along with the cushioning effect of the torque converter, lend the power unit near-six-cylinder sweetness as it revs, and there is enough torque to give the 2000 energetic acceleration with a keen mid-range kickdown. You are reasonably aware of the body lean, more so because the seating position is quite high in a car that, by the early 1970s, was already looking ever so slightly tall and narrow.

The Rover, designed in the 1950s, appears something of a fish out of water among this modern Euro-saloon line-up of rational 2-litre machines. To understand its positioning, you have to look at the prices: at £2174, it was cheaper than everything other than the BMW. For that, you got a beautifully finished V8-engined saloon that looked bigger than all the others yet was an inch shorter than the NSU, even if it weighed almost 1000lb more.

This Coupé, owned by John Wallet almost since new, is one of the best: I feel extremely

honoured to be the first person John has ever allowed to drive it. He probably noticed the twinkle in my eye for a model I have always loved (I've had five or six) and always will. It might be thirsty – 15mpg – and have super-light steering, but you can't really compare the feeling of wafting luxury that it gives you against the others, or the sheer presence of its handsome, squat-roofed body. It is a terrible piece of packaging – lacking in both head- and legroom for rear passengers – but in Coupé form I think it is one of the best-looking British four-door cars of all time.

In a way, the Rover has become better with age, its subtle charms outweighing its dynamic failings. In 1968, the mostly youthful *Motor* writers could not get on with the big 3.5 Litre on the twisty roads of their northern test route, yet they were all surprised by the ease with which it kept station with the other cars. It is not a vehicle that is naturally disposed to being hustled or hurried, although a good P5B will readily hitch up its skirts when required. It just tends to feel more dramatic and less inherently nimble than these middleweight Euro types. Body roll is, actually, far from scary, and that light, high-g geared steering becomes somehow part of the experience.

BMW 2000

Sold/number built 1966-'72/151,655

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc 1990cc 'four', single/twin Solex carbs

Max power 100bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 116lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual or three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar
rear semi-trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Steering ZF-Gemmer worm and roller

Length 14ft 9in (4496mm)

Width 5ft 7in (1702mm)

Height 4ft 8½in (1410mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4½in (2555mm)

Weight 2491lb (1130kg)

0-60mph 11.4 secs

Top speed 105mph **Mpg** 22-28

Price new £1996

In the end, the Rover is easily the most suave of these cars, its natural habitat being either the city – where the torque, the effortless steering and the automatic 'box mean you can burble around with an aloof feeling of isolation on those fantastic seats – or the motorway, where it is solid and stable, with silky V8 urge to spare. No, there's nothing like a P5B... Except perhaps a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, which you can now have for about the same money – a thought that, for me, tends to put the charms of the Rover into perspective.

Driving Phil Blake's 1975 Ro80 makes me realise how rarely I have sampled a really good example. With its quiet gearbox, silent and supple suspension, and an engine with strong compression on both rotors, it is sensationally refined and deceptively fast: quicker than its on-paper 0-60mph in 13 secs and 113mph top speed might suggest.

You soon get used to the clutchless semi-automatic if it's set up correctly, and you can, of course, pull away in top gear should you wish to abuse the privilege of having no valves to worry about. There are three forward ratios – NSU liked owners to think of them as 'speed ranges' rather than gears – with 'first' left and down. It churns its torque converter a little at

'There is nothing like a P5B... Except perhaps a Silver Shadow, which is about the same money'

first, but really gets on its toes between 40 and 80mph in second as you wind it out to a sublime 6500rpm. Here the engine emits a remote, totally unstrained and jet-like whistle. It feels completely natural to cruise at 110mph or more, with an eerie lack of road or wind noise in a euphoria of stability and serenity, and supported by fantastic brakes.

The shape is yet another major element in the NSU's appeal. For me, the Ro80's body is breathtakingly well-proportioned, with no unnecessary fuss. Somehow it just doesn't look German, even if the beautiful Fuchs alloys are a clue. The good news continues inside: it is obviously a well-made vehicle with a neat, durable and airy cabin. Look closer and there is no evidence of unnecessary weight (the seats must be half as heavy as the Rover's club armchairs, for instance), presumably in an

attempt to curb the Wankel's thirst, which for me has always been its main stumbling block.

Like the Audi and Citroën, the NSU is driven by its front wheels. With long-travel springs – it laughs at speed humps – it feels closest to the DS in flavour but is less disorientating; its sharp brakes are more natural to modulate and you soon realise that the precise, kickback-free power steering is superb. Short of a 100mph handbrake turn in the middle lane of the M1, I doubt whether anything would shatter the impression of poise and sheer competence with which the Ro80 leaves you.

It is hard for me to be dispassionate about the NSU. In 20 years I've done more time in Ro80s than any other type of car – classic or otherwise. Over 50,000 miles, my first example only let me down a couple of times (and never for any terminal reason), and I have been hooked on them ever since. So you'll forgive me if I say that engine problems, while certainly no myth, are nothing like as inevitable as the detractors might have you believe. There are fewer of those naysayers today, and the Ro80 is best remembered as the most daring production saloon of its era. It is a special, silkily serene experience that everyone who is interested in cars should try at least once. 



Clockwise: distinctive Coupé has 2½in-lower roof; traditional timber fillets and plump, leather-clad chairs; neat tool tray slides out of the centre console; twin SU carbs sit in vee

ROVER 3.5 LITRE COUPÉ

Sold/number built 1967-'73/9099

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, ohv 3528cc 90° V8, twin SU carburettors

Max power 151bhp @ 5200rpm

Max torque 201lb ft @ 2750rpm

Transmission three-speed Borg-Warner Type 35 automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by wishbones, torsion bars, anti-roll bar
rear live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 15ft 7in (4750mm)

Width 5ft 10in (1791mm)

Height 4ft 10in (1473mm)

Wheelbase 9ft 2in (2807mm)

Weight 3500lb (1587kg)

0-60mph 12.4 secs

Top speed 113mph **Mpg** 17-20

Price new £2270

RAPIDE REACTION



The idea was good, but the V8 Lagonda four-door was hit by hard times. Two of the seven built demonstrate its appeal

WORDS **TONY DRON** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



Back in 1969, Sir David Brown feared that Lagonda was being forgotten. The Rapide, dropped in 1963, had been the last to use the name, so Sir David instructed his engineers to build a one-off V8 Lagonda for his own use – and for promotional purposes. The handful of four-doors that followed much later remain highly prized in Aston Martin Lagonda circles: two are featured here, one near-standard car from 1974, just restored by specialist Richard Stewart Williams, the other – dating from late the same year – being Richard's own, modified car. He has owned it for more than 20 years, incorporating upgrades of the type, he says, "Aston Martin Lagonda would have carried out had the car been produced 15 years later".

They are both great to drive, but let's not jump the gun. That '69 one-off was based on the prototype DBS chassis, lengthened by 12in in the wheelbase and fitted with the then-new 5-litre V8. The chassis was strengthened to retain adequate torsional rigidity, and stiffer springs were used to give the same ride quality. This increased the payload to 386kg from 318 – just the thing for carrying those corpulent captains of industry. Painted Roman Purple, with a crimson velvet interior, this spectacular creation was featured on BBC2's *Wheelbase* (like *Top Gear*, but for grown-ups). Hints were dropped about a possible production run.

After that splash, enquiries were expected to flood in, but nothing much happened and the project gathered dust for five years. Some say that a few customers pestered the factory for such cars later on, but that hardly rings true. We do know that, by August 1974 – three years after Sir David Brown had sold the firm – the Lagonda four-door had been resurrected, with single headlights as on the V8 but with its own distinctive (yet strangely unattractive) grille. By then the factory was entering a spell of serious financial woe, and the new owners seemed to take a rational decision. Here was a proven prototype, sitting around doing nothing: easy enough to productionise without new jigs, it broadened the range and created publicity.

Early Lagonda saloon retains rear treatment of DBS coupé. This car, one of two manuals, also benefits from recently rebuilt Adwest power steering



ASTON MARTIN LAGONDA

Sold/number built 1974-'76/seven

Construction steel chassis, aluminium body **Engine** all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 5340cc V8, four Weber carburettors

Max power 310bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 280lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission five-speed ZF manual, RWD **Suspension: front** independent, by wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** de Dion axle, radius arms; coils, telescopic f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion **Top speed** 145mph

0-100mph 18 secs **Mpg** 13

Price new £14,040 (1974)

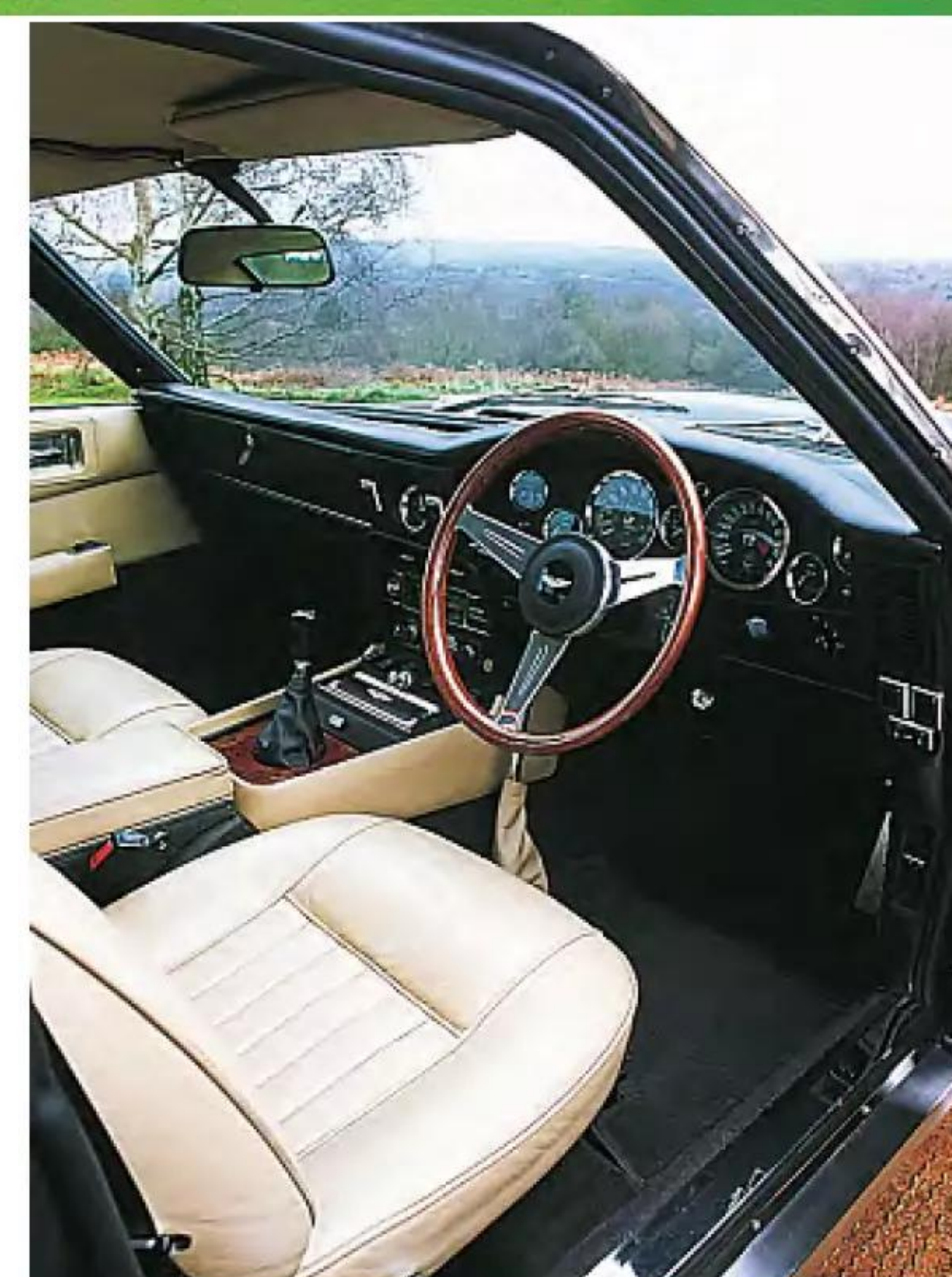
Called the Aston Martin Lagonda, the four-door was shown at Earl's Court in 1974, priced at £14,040 – £2691 more than a V8. The company claimed 0-100mph in 18 secs, against the two-door's 13.6 secs. It said production would settle to one saloon per fortnight but, to meet initial demand, it would make two a week.

The Lagonda was well received: a beautiful, fast four-door saloon had been created out of the coupé. It was 16ft 2in long – 13½in longer than the Aston V8, ¾in taller and 268kg heavier, at 1995kg. The longer wheelbase also increased the turning circle from 38ft to a rather unwieldy 44ft 6in. The gearing was shortened to give 26.2mph per 1000rpm in top with the standard auto 'box (the V8 auto did 27.9mph), no doubt to maintain good acceleration, but the fuel tank was a gallon smaller, now at 20 gallons. The original four-door auto's top speed was about 145mph. Opposition included the Monica, also at that London show; but that gorgeous car, similar in size, performance and looks to the Lagonda, had died in France before the winter was out, and all attempts to save it failed.

Cost was thought to matter even at this end of the market, but was a high price a bad thing? The Monica's projected price, around £14k, had been about a grand more than Rolls-Royce's Silver Shadow and Bentley T-series. Aston Martin Lagonda saw its four-door car first and foremost as a competitor to the models from Crewe – even though a Jaguar XJ12L then cost just £5491. The Lagonda offered even more exclusivity than any of those luxurious large saloon cars, and it was considerably faster. A real rival was the £15,009 Lamborghini Espada III, with further competition from the Iso Fidia and Monteverdi HS 375/4, but even so, there appeared to be room for Lagonda in this rarefied end of the market.

By early 1976, the Lagonda was listed at £15,638 and the Espada had dropped to £14,403, but the Rolls-Royce and Bentley models were nudging £17,000. At first, its maker tried to keep the Lagonda competitive on price, but then gave up. Yet its dramatic increases were academic: despite consistently bold claims, Aston Martin Lagonda was in big trouble financially, so we shall never know how well the car might have sold in a healthier economic climate. Just seven were made: the prototype, four production cars and two more completed in the service department under the new management that came in during 1975. In June '76, all AML production was formally ceased under receivership. By then, William Towns, designer of the original DBS, was deeply involved in his extraordinary Lagonda four-door wedge saloon, launched in October 1976. This went on to sell in huge numbers by Aston standards – 610 – and it saved the company.

The first thing you notice is the relatively high driving position and low steering wheel. Even so, it's comfortable enough. There is a well-placed fly-off handbrake and the clutch is light and smooth, feeling far better than the technology available 30 years ago. That, plus the superb ZF gearbox, makes it easy to move off, and driveable in traffic. This is one of only two such early Lagonda V8s with manual gearboxes. It's not the fastest of changes, but the sense of high quality in the movement of the lever is not bettered, even today. This car is easy to use, but you are aware of its size. Despite being even bigger and heavier, from the driving seat it doesn't feel very different from a two-door V8. Opening the throttle in second gear, it accelerates impressively. This is a long-legged car, and it just seems to pull for ever. The higher the revs, the better the



performance, with an exciting cacophony coming from the engine. It's hard to find anywhere reasonably safe, let alone legal, to take it to the 6000rpm redline in second, never mind the next three gears. Such a fabulous machine really wants to lope along at more than 100mph, but, unlike some supercars, it is relaxing at lower speeds, making it a truly luxurious grand tourer in the classic style.

The powerful standard brakes give a strong sense of confidence. There's a fair amount of pedal travel but plenty of feel, and they slow the big car effectively and securely. Its tyres are 235/70x15 Avons in place of the original 225s. With the latest Konis all round, the damping is excellent. The ride is better controlled and slightly firmer than with the originals, but the main difference is that these dampers should hold their performance, hot or cold, for tens of thousands of miles; those in the '70s would have worn out much earlier. They were the best available in their day, but modern shock absorbers are in a different league. This car also has a more efficient radiator, a modern ignition system, special mildly tweaked RSW camshafts and altered valve-seat heights. The engine has been modified to run on unleaded fuel, there's that modern clutch, an upgraded charging circuit and an air-conditioning compressor. It's no doubt quicker than it was in 1974, and probably better built, too.

Although this is a saloon car, it handles just as well as the two-door and is even more confidence-inspiring in the wet, says Richard. On the move there's a slight trace of tremor through the chassis and body every now and then, but the structure feels taut, it rides poor road surfaces well and wind noise is surprisingly low. There's loads of room in the rear, with plenty of leg- and headroom even for

very tall people. Bloated plutocrats could easily take to the back with the *Financial Times*, leaving all the fun to a lucky chauffeur.

Richard's own car, by way of comparison, is intriguing. It looks different – there's a special bonnet and an upswept, V8-style tail rather than the plainer DBS-like rear end. At its heart is the 7-litre engine conversion, which makes a lot more power and, more especially, torque. An RSW-rebuilt standard 5.3 gives 310bhp and 280lb ft; the 7-litre has 400bhp and 530lb ft, so it's well suited to the three-speed Torqueflite automatic gearbox. This makes it even more relaxing to drive, although you do miss the sensuous pleasure of the ZF manual. Even with the auto, on kickdown you quickly notice a big difference. The more powerful engine leaves most high-performance modern cars gasping behind it. You can hear massive amounts of air/fuel mixture howling down those beautifully smooth inlet tracts. This engine breathes well and you can feel it doing so when the throttle pedal is held to the floor.

Care is needed, because the effect, the sheer brutal acceleration, is quite startling. Never mind that it's heavy, has four doors and it's decades old – it's incredibly quick. The brakes on both cars are in effect the same, but the set-up is slightly different, giving shorter travel and a firmer feel in Richard's car, yet both stop equally well. There's a slight pulsing through the power steering, but that's harmless, just a sign of age. Richard reckons there's no point throwing money away on such a small fault.

The massive performance of the 7-litre V8 is a huge inducement to choose it over the other car, yet I was swayed by the ZF 'box, the brake-pedal feel and the older machine's rebuilt steering. The manual car with the bigger engine would have to be the ultimate. 



Richard Williams' own car has modified bonnet and Kamm-like tail. Its tweaked 7-litre gives 400bhp, with phenomenal kickdown



ASTON MARTIN LAGONDA 7-LITRE

(where different from 5.3)

Engine 7003cc

Max power 400bhp @ 5000rpm

Max torque 530lb ft @ 2750rpm

Transmission Chrysler Torqueflite
three-speed automatic

Top speed 145mph

0-100mph 13.6 secs (est)

Mpg n/a **Price new** n/a





If you can't afford a Jaguar...

...then try these instead. It's a late-'70s middle manager's automotive dilemma: Renault 30, Lancia Gamma, Citroën CX or Rover 3500?

WORDS **ANDREW ROBERTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

In *haute* suburbia of the late 1970s, in between bouts of fondue suppers *à la Abigail's Party*, there tended to be two main topics of conversation. The first concerned Number 16's alleged misdemeanours with their Luncheon Voucher allowance, and the second regarded the latest breed of executive transport. The softly sprung barge was completely *de trop*, because the go-ahead insurance broker was shifting allegiance to four-door fastbacks that combined looks, handling, performance and – naturally – that 1977 buzzword, 'aerodynamics'.

Despite its streamlined looks, however, Citroën's CX was less slippery than its DS predecessor. It is also a car that requires, indeed demands, a certain amount of acclimatisation. The brake pedal must be carefully caressed unless you wish to catapult yourself into the dashboard, then there's a semi-automatic gearbox, the disconcerting, self-centring powered steering, indicators that don't self-cancel and a speedometer that bears a distinct resemblance to a set of bathroom scales. Virtually nothing dates faster than past ideas of the future, yet the Citroën's lines are barely distinguishable from designs its junior by 30 years or more.

The CX's Robert Opron-styled coachwork had already been anticipated by the 1970 GS, but as both a replacement for the DS and a vehicle in its own right, the new Citroën was a quantum leap in European car design. The original plans were more radical still, for the CX was to be powered by a Comotor rotary engine, but this joint venture with NSU was cancelled on the grounds of cost just months before the new car's debut. By the early '70s, the firm's financial problems were legion, and while the CX was causing a sensation at the 1974 Paris Salon and being hailed as 1975's Car of the Year, the unthinkable was taking place behind the scenes: Citroën was in the process of being acquired by Peugeot.

But if the CX was the swansong of the truly independent Citroën, it was an appropriate one. It was the company's first transverse-engined car, and combined a development of the SM's Diravi variable-ratio power steering with the 2-litre engine from the DS and the marque's famed hydropneumatic suspension. In response to demand for more power and luxury, the flagship 2400 Pallas arrived in 1977, complete with that must-have late-'70s accessory, electric front windows.

Once used to the CX's way of motoring, you feel as though you are not so much driving



CITROËN CX 2400 PALLAS

Sold/number built 1975-'91/1,042,300

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohv 2347cc 'four', single Weber carburettor

Max power 115bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 131lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission three-speed semi-automatic, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by upper and lower arms **rear** trailing arms; interconnected hydropneumatic self-levelling, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering powered rack and pinion

Brakes powered discs

Length 15ft 2½in (4636mm)

Width 5ft 8in (1727mm)

Height 4ft 5½in (1359mm)

Wheelbase 9ft 4in (2845mm)

Weight 2722lb (1234kg)

0-60mph 11.6 secs

Top speed 112mph **Mpg** 21

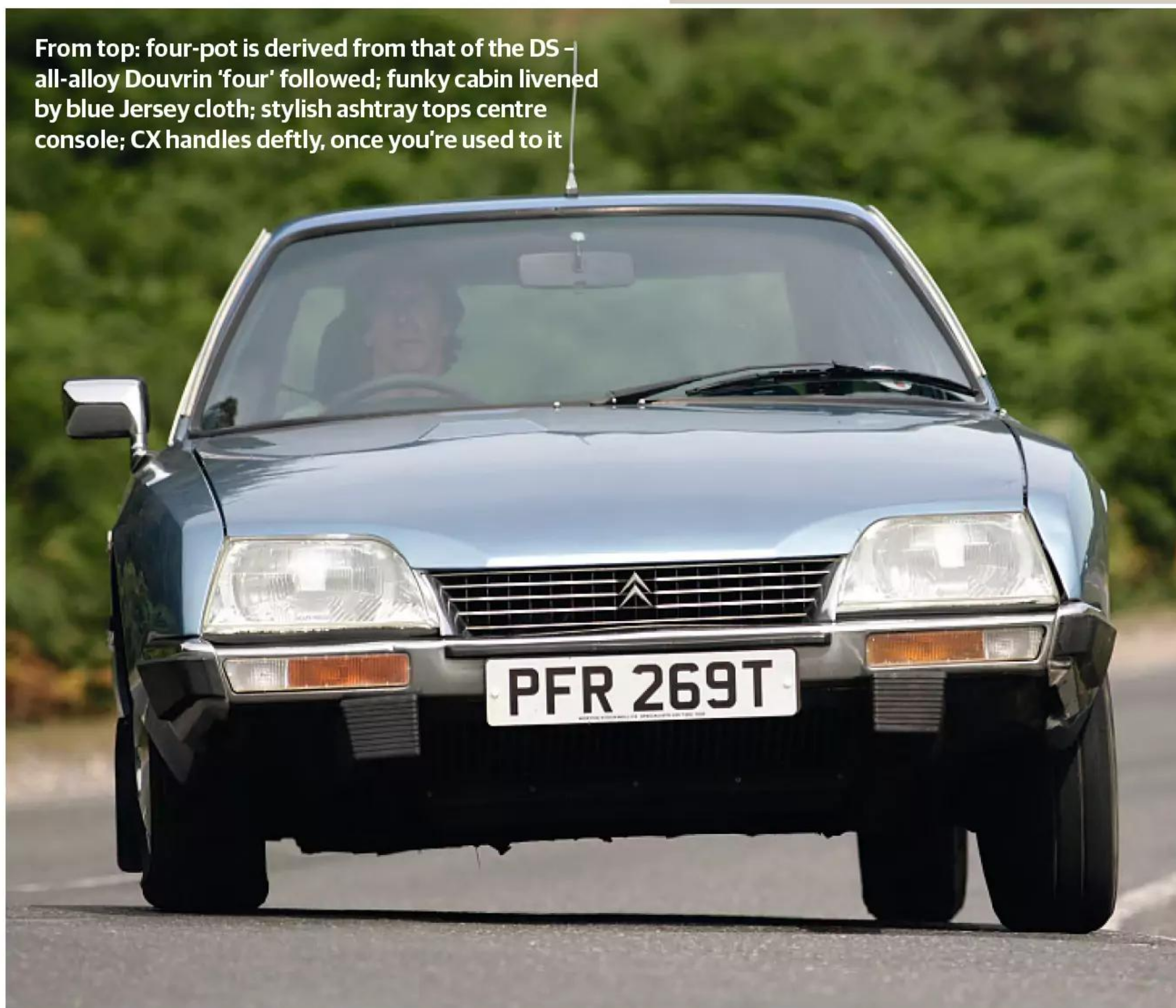
Price new £6399

CHRIS PECK



London-based Citroën specialist Chris Peck's immaculate 2400 Pallas has belonged to one of his clients for the past year. "Once you get over the inherent weirdness of the car – such as the steering, or the clutch and torque converter in one unit – it is one of the finest 'drivers' cars' that you will ever experience," he enthuses. "It is now, at last, being recognised as a truly great classic car."

From top: four-pot is derived from that of the DS – all-alloy Douvrin 'four' followed; funky cabin livened by blue Jersey cloth; stylish ashtray tops centre console; CX handles deftly, once you're used to it





Clockwise: distinctive indicators and fastback shape led to 'five-door Daytona' tag; clever dash designed so it could be used on right- and left-hand-drive cars; all-alloy V8 sounds great; spacious cabin



a wheeled vehicle as piloting a small hovercraft as you float along with a minimum of fuss, the four or even five occupants cocooned in blue velour-trimmed comfort. On country lanes the handling is assured: the variable helm is light for approaching bends at a low speed, feeling more direct as the accelerator is pressed. When the CX was replaced by the XM in 1989, it severed the last true link with André Citroën's design philosophy, and the marque's future looked to be a bleak one of badge-engineering.

You expect individuality with a Citroën, but when the Rover SD1 was given its debut in the summer of 1976 it caused a seismic reaction among the firm's more conservative buyers. How, they demanded as they looked aghast at the 3500's cuboid dashboard and skeletal Viking badge, could this be a real Rover? Why, it even lacked walnut-veneered door cappings! But such carping was just another example of the British national pastime of missing the point, for the SD1 was going to be the design to reinvigorate the marque.

Almost the only familiar aspect of the SD1 was its Buick-derived V8 engine, which the firm had been using since 1967. This new Rover would combine conventional engineering with coachwork that was a refreshing change for a UK-built luxury car. Prior to 1976, the only British five-door hatchback on sale was the not terribly prestigious Austin Maxi, so the new Rover would be a very brave departure from the executive norm of the day. The SD1's predecessor, the once-radical P6, had been firmly established for the past 13 years as a 'typical Rover', even if stylist David Bache's coachwork for the SD1 was quite possibly the high point of a distinguished career.

The paradox of Bache's design was that its very lack of traditionalism was in keeping with Rover's nonconformist design philosophy. None of the marque's great post-war saloon cars – the 1949 P4, 1958 P5 and 1963 P6 – had embraced tradition for its own sake, with each model concentrating on engineering excellence rather than pandering to obsolete ideas of middle-class respectability. Besides, what red-blooded chartered accountant could possibly resist the chance to own a 'five-door Ferrari 365GTB/4 Daytona'?

Initially, the SD1 offered every indication that it would be one of Britain's truly great mass-produced cars. The handling was safe and predictable, it was utterly stable at high speed, the ride was not over-firm and the steering was quick and light, yet precise. Above all, there was the refined but formidable roar of that V8 engine at full pelt, a sound that made owners forgive Rover for fitting an instrument panel that looked like a Lego set. Offering an impressive combination of price, prestige and performance, the SD1 was the obvious choice for Car of the Year in 1977.

All that was then required, in true British Leyland tradition, was for the entire project to be almost completely sabotaged by a manufacturing plant that appeared to be infested by the spirit of Peter Sellers in *I'm All Right Jack*, with inadequate supplies of cars that displayed appalling panel fit and a marked tendency towards electrical failure once they finally arrived in the showrooms. By 1981, the goodwill generated for this groundbreaking car had almost entirely dissipated, and although the SD1 would continue in production until 1987, the last real opportunity to maintain

ROVER 3500

Sold/number built 1976-'86/303,345

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, ohv 3528cc V8, twin SUs

Max power 155bhp @ 5250rpm

Max torque 198lb ft @ 2500rpm

Transmission three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar rear live axle, torque tube, radius arms, Watt linkage, coil springs, self-levelling Boge dampers

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 15ft 5in (4690mm)

Width 5ft 9½in (1770mm)

Height 4ft 5¼in (1360mm)

Wheelbase 9ft 2¾in (2815mm)

Weight 3330lb (1512kg)

0-60mph 9.7 secs

Top speed 126mph **Mpg** 20.7

Price new £7724

PAUL RIDLEY



A classic enthusiast and the owner of a transport firm, Paul owns one of the first SD1s to hail from Solihull. He is eloquent, if not vociferous, on the merits of the much-maligned Rover: "No other car in its price bracket at that time could offer such class, style and performance. Forget the 1970s clichés and see the SD1 as it really is."



From top: when did you last see one of these? R30 is a rare sight on UK roads; sweet-sounding V6 gives strong performance; comfort and equipment were praised when new

RENAULT 30TX

Sold/number built 1975-'84/160,265

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 2664cc V6, Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection

Max power 141bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 161lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission three-speed automatic, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by upper transverse link, forward reaction arm, lower wishbones, coil springs **rear** MacPherson struts; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 14ft 10in (4520mm)

Width 5ft 8½in (1730mm)

Height 4ft 9in (1430mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 9in (2670mm)

Weight 2833lb (1285kg)

0-60mph 9 secs

Top speed 117mph **Mpg** 22

Price new £6774



the Viking badge's reputation as the symbol of understated quality had long since passed.

In the late 1970s, Renault GB ran a campaign featuring a black 30TS crossing a red carpet, and for some unaccountable reason this impressed upon my younger self that here was the ultimate suburban status symbol. In its homeland, France's national car maker was aiming at the government fleet market, long dominated by Citroën, and in the UK the battle for sales was even fiercer. Few Britons had even the vaguest recollection of the 1951-'60 Frégate, *La Régie's* previous attempt at an executive car.

Still, Renault dealers should have had cause for being quietly confident, because the 30 was, in the most mild-mannered way, a genuinely prestigious and desirable motor car. When the 30TS was launched in 1975 – a large hatchback that predated the Rover SD1 by more than a year, as Renault fans are keen to point out – it was praised for its excellent road manners and decadently comfortable interior. *Motor's* main – and indeed almost sole – gripe concerned inadequate doorhandles.

Power came from the 2.7-litre Douvrin V6 that was also fitted to the Peugeot 604 and Volvo 264, but in 1979 there was a new flagship in the form of the fuel-injected 30TX, instantly recognisable by its alloy wheels and even more lavish interior with, for the UK market only, the dubious addition of a badly fitted 'wood veneer' dashboard. Happily, Andy Mitchell's example has the rather more refined post-'80 instrument display, together with all of the quirks that once made Renaults so entertaining – not least a rear seat mechanism that involves tying the backrest to the grabhandles.

It is the 30's ride and armchair-like seats, however, that are the key to its character. Even the CX feels firm in comparison. The 30 is a true *boulevardier*, designed to waft four passengers along the *autoroutes* in softly

ANDY MITCHELL



Andy Mitchell has owned this 30TX since 1987, after trading in a TS, and a Renault 20 is his everyday car.

He is clearly a devotee, saying: "I was impressed by the comfort and power – it's ideal for longer journeys. I drove 17 Gordinis when I was young, but nothing compared to the 30 – and that's still the case!" Andy reckons fewer than 10 30s remain on UK roads.

sprung comfort, while retaining the potential to be a five-door sporting saloon should circumstances demand it. British sales were always limited, and the introduction in 1978 of the 20TS, which shared the same body but with a far more economical engine, further hampered its chances. By the time the 20/30 range was replaced by the 25 in 1984, inside a Renault brochure was the most likely place to spot a 30 because it had become a truly unusual sight on British roads.

But for real exclusivity in the late 1970s, you simply had to drive a Lancia Gamma Berlina, a front-wheel-drive 'four' in a world dominated by the likes of the Ford Granada. No photograph has ever done justice to the Gamma saloon, because while in print it may bear a slightly unfortunate resemblance to the pre-war Burney Streamline, in the metal the rear buttresses and purposeful stance lend its lines a sense of almost pre-war elegance. As with the Rover, the Gamma had a serious mission: to reintroduce the shield badge to the large prestige saloon car market of Europe – and to prevent Lancia enthusiasts from loudly bewailing that, because Fiat had acquired the company, it was end of civilisation *per se*.



Clockwise: Gamma looks like a hatch, but rear buttresses conceal a conventional four-door shell; glass panel in bootlid aids rearward vision; large flat-four is lively; stylish and well equipped interior



LANCIA GAMMA BERLINA

Sold/number built 1976-'84/15,296

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 2494cc flat-four, single Weber carburettor

Max power 140bhp @ 5400rpm

Max torque 153lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** spring struts, transverse links; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted ZF rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 3in (4648mm)

Width 5ft 8in (1730mm)

Height 4ft 7½in (1410mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 9in (2670mm)

Weight 2953lb (1339kg)

0-60mph 9.6 secs

Top speed 121mph **Mpg** 19

Price new £7136

When the Gamma made its debut in 1976, it was not merely the long-awaited replacement for the Flavia, because it also succeeded the 130 as the flagship of the entire Fiat Group. It was decreed that not only would the Gamma have few interchangeable parts with any other Lancia, but there would also be absolutely no parts in common with any Fiat – a brave, if commercially dubious, decision. Power was from Lancia's famed flat-four in 2- and 2.5-litre forms – plans for six- and even eight-cylinder versions were (sensibly) quashed on the grounds of cost – and two styles were offered: the Coupé, built in tiny numbers by Pininfarina, and the in-house Berlina.

Unfortunately, although the Berlina was well equipped and impeccably mannered, too few business customers were prepared to countenance being seen a car bearing such idiosyncratic coachwork and powered by a lowly four-cylinder engine. As it happened, the Gamma's powerplants did not prove to be an economic move: they were prone to overheating and the cambelts were weak, the latter being particularly unwelcome news because the power steering was cam-driven. UK imports of the 2.5-litre saloon commenced in 1978, but the marque's scarcity on British roads looked likely to continue following the impact of the 'Beta Rust Scandal' of 1979 – as if the big Lancia's habit of snapping its cambelt when on full lock was not enough of a marketing challenge.

Ironically, by 1980 the second generation of Gammas had ironed out many of the early problems and boasted even more equipment, plus Bosch fuel injection. Although Gamma enthusiasts could justly claim that the Berlina

had the agility of a sports car and a capacious interior, plus smoothness of performance and a ride that could give a CX a run for its money, it was all to no avail. The saloon ceased production in 1984, after fewer than 16,000 had been made, and the next Lancia prestige model, the Thema, would be a co-production with Fiat, Saab and, the killer blow for all marque fans, in-house rival Alfa Romeo.

Deciding which one of these thoroughly enjoyable cars should grace the driveway of a desirable townhouse (with avocado en suite bathroom) is extraordinarily difficult. The Lancia and the Citroën have an instant appeal to the connoisseur. The Gamma is a vehicle that deserves so much more than a footnote in the marque's history, and the handsome yet quirky CX is best summarised by the famed quote: 'After 10 minutes, you never want to drive one again. After an hour, you never want to drive anything else again'.

As for the SD1, if any car was to forge a new identity for the newly nationalised British Leyland, it was the Rover 3500, and the tragedy of this fine car is that it so nearly succeeded. By a narrow margin, however, victory goes to the Renault, for its combination of Gallic charm, performance, styling and cossetting ride. Equally importantly, to own a 30TX would be to realise a 30-year dream: who says that classic car buying has to be rational? 

Thanks to Citroën Car Club (citroencarclub.org.uk); Morton Stockwell DS Restorations (020 7482 7050); Lancia Motor Club (lanciamotorclub.co.uk); Renault Classic Car Club (renaultclassiccarchub.com); Rover SD1 Club (roversd1club.net); Paul Ridley Classic Transport; Patrick Rugg of Keyhaven, Lymington

ANDY COLLINS



Lancia Motor Club stalwart Andy Collins is passionate about his Gamma. "It's supremely comfortable and it

handles brilliantly," he says. "In many ways it's like the Triumph Stag, in that it was not foolproof: don't whack a cold Gamma on full lock!" As for styling, Andy points out its similarity to the '67 Pininfarina Aerodymanica prototype.



Smooth operators

The XJ had the UK's luxury saloon market sewn up before the Germans got a foothold, but Peugeot's take on the barge, the 604, ran Coventry closer than you might think

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **MAX EDLESTON**



In the mid-1970s, a whole swathe of newly minted European executive saloon cars appeared. Some had been held over from the early years of the decade, awaiting the end of the first Fuel Crisis, while others were simply too far down the developmental line to cancel altogether. Although sales of large saloons were in an overall slump, the promise of higher profit margins per unit, and the chance to boost corporate prestige with a flagship product, made the big-car class a difficult sector to ignore.

Germany was already in the ascendancy: the relentless success of Mercedes-Benz – with BMW coming up fast on the inside – showed there was still a fortune to be made as long as the product and the image were right. In Britain, one of the natural homes of the luxury car, Jaguar held the fort while other great names lost their way: the imaginatively designed but abysmally executed 1976 Rover 3500 showed how hard-won reputations for excellence could be casually squandered.

It was hard to predict what the French might come up with. As strangers to the world of large-engined cars for decades (thanks to punitive taxation on anything over 2.8 litres), the country's manufacturers tackled the problem of building a luxury saloon for the cash-strapped '70s with two new designs: enter, within just months of each other in 1975, the Peugeot 604 SL and Renault 30 TS.

At the heart of this two-pronged French assault was a new engine, the same jointly developed, oversquare, 2.7-litre all-alloy V6 seen a year earlier in the Volvo 264 and Peugeot 504 Coupé, but denied – perhaps for reasons of corporate jealousy – the new Citroën CX.

The light and compact new co-op V6 had a gentle 8.65:1 compression ratio, chain-driven single overhead camshafts and a 90° angle between its cylinder banks: the resulting uneven firing order suggested that, like the

Citroën SM V6, it had been conceived initially as a V8 but only realised as a less profligate V6 in the wake of the 1973 fuel shortages.

By tweaking the timing, Peugeot made the PRV V6 spin as sweetly as any contemporary, even if the curious combination of one single-choke and one twin-choke carburettor – the former for small throttle openings, the latter for higher loads – didn't sound like a recipe for seamless acceleration.

The 604 SL was the more traditional of the French newcomers, eschewing front-drive and hatchback versatility for a rear-driven, Pininfarina-styled three-box saloon whose deceptively sophisticated underpinnings had been skilfully extrapolated from the well-established 504 saloon: the 604 was 9in longer overall and had a 2in-longer wheelbase. The bulkhead, doors and most of the floorpan were shared with the 2-litre car, along with the basics – if not the necessarily the detail – of its suspension and drivetrain.

The torque tube, good for damping out harshness and vibration, was typically Peugeot, and a great deal of attention had been paid to the bushing of the long-travel, semi-trailing-arm rear suspension to attenuate the transmission of road noise. By sharing its components with lesser models, Peugeot was able to price the 604 competitively against international opposition and bring it to market fully equipped for its task. Four-wheel disc brakes, power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering and electric windows all came as standard, while leather seats, air-con and a wash-wipe for the headlights were optional.

The 604, allegedly designed in just eight months, was heavy for its 136bhp, and neither was it the fastest in its class nor the most frugal: even with the four-speed manual 'box you could only expect 18mpg. Yet the 604 offset these criticisms with high levels of refinement, and in terms of smoothness, ride quality, and suppression of road and wind noise, it was



From top: smooth V6 is compact and relatively light, helping balance; 604 badge appeared in 1975; tyres' generous sidewalls aid excellent ride



Daimler manages body movements better than the 604. Right, from top: the road surface is well isolated; 4.2-litre XK 'six' is strong on torque



'In terms of smoothness and ride, the 604 was probably the only car to truly rival the standard-setting Jaguar XJ'



probably the only car to truly rival the standard-setting Jaguar XJ – and was certainly way ahead of the relatively noisy, firmly-sprung German saloons of the period. As one of the most restful and comfortable cars available at any price, the 604 also had class-leading rear-seat head- and legroom, and a cavernously deep boot.

Things got off to a good start, with 36,000 sold in year one, but that early success tailed off from the late '70s onwards, despite regular attempts at updating the concept. In fact, the introduction of the more compact Peugeot 505 in 1979 did as much as anything to curb the popularity of the 604. In search of more power, Peugeot supplemented the 604 range with the K-Jetronic fuel-injected, 142bhp TI in 1978, then in 1981 the Michelin TRX-shod STI arrived fitted with a ZF (rather than GM) three-speed automatic 'box or a five-speed manual. Sales of turbodiesel-equipped 604s had modestly boosted the model's popularity since the late 1970s, but attempts at capturing the North American market had, predictably, foundered.

The carburetted SL was pensioned off in 1982, and in 1984 the range-topping 155bhp, 2.8-litre 604 GTI replaced the STI.

By the time the 604 appeared, the XJ had been updated to Series 2 specification in 1973. The waiting lists were as long as ever and not helped by the fact that the workforce appeared to spend as much time on the picket line as the production lines. With the 2.8 discontinued and the long-wheelbase shell now the standard body, Jaguar's answer for economy-minded buyers was the S2 3.4, which in 1975 met the carburetted 604 SL head-on at just under £5000.

The significantly livelier, better-equipped and barely greedier XJ 4.2 made a lot more sense if you could find the extra £400. Robert Hughes' beautifully preserved and almost entirely original S2 Daimler Sovereign 4.2, a beautiful 18,000-mile example, is as familiar to British eyes as the 604 is virtually unknown today, yet there is an air of formal and clean-lined dignity about the big Peugeot that brings with it an appeal all of its own.

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Clockwise from above: 604's rear passengers are well cared for; clear but workmanlike dials; inviting cabin, but some of the trim feels cheap



Clockwise from above: cocooning rear chairs; supportive seats and a good view out; XJ6 received a switchgear update in Series 2 guise



'Our' 1981 604 TI must be one of the best in captivity, having been the subject of a great deal of recent restoration work by Salisbury-based HC Classics: as well as tackling the usual 604 rust, the car's suspension, brakes and steering have all been rebuilt, and its electricals refurbished. Parts are not easy to find, as you might imagine, but a donor 604 helped.

With its wide-opening doors and lavish rear legroom, it is easy to see why the 604 became the default French ministerial car. But if the XJ Sovereign – perhaps the definitive British saloon-car shape – doesn't have a bad angle, the Peugeot can look heavy when caught in the wrong light, with too much boxy rear-end overhang (hence the gigantic boot) but almost nothing at the front, revealing how its designers took advantage of the compact V6.

The 604 is slightly narrower and significantly shorter than the Sovereign, and it has an extra inch of wheelbase. It also gives the impression of towering over the sleek and sinuous maroon XJ, but is actually only half an inch taller.

At 3200lb, the 604 is notably less hefty than the 3700lb Daimler, but, with its 170bhp and 231lb ft of torque, the XK 'six' is well equipped to cope with the disparity. The 604's alloy V6, covered with injection plumbing, looks an unremarkable installation compared with the elegantly sculptural XK's proud cam covers and simple twin SU carburettor set-up.

Inside, both cars are good places to be, if for different reasons. Retrimmed in leather (and converted from manual to automatic for its current dotting owner), the 604 has an inviting cabin in which the comfort and wellbeing of its rear passengers has been given as much consideration as that of those in the front, with reading lights and built-in head restraints. The seats are large and soft but not soggy, and while '70s road testers complained about the rising runners on the driver's seat, which meant the cushion was too low when pushed right back, I had no trouble getting comfortable.

Cloth – standard on the XJ 3.4 and XJC – was an option on the 4.2 saloon, but, like most, this

Daimler variant has leather. You slide down into and almost wear the car, with its narrow footwells, lowish roof and impressive length of bonnet viewed through a narrow windscreen. The seats appear less lavish than the Peugeot's, but are more supportive against the decent cornering forces both cars can generate.

Even in rationalised Series 2 form, with new column stalks replacing the handsome rocker switches, the Sovereign has more pleasing – and less brittle – detailing than the Peugeot, with its bland slab of injection-moulded plastic, fussy glassed-in instrumentation and oddly placed minor switchgear.

Thin 'screen pillars mean good all-round vision in the XJ, but the 604's short, flat bonnet, higher-set driving position and squared-off extremities make it particularly easy to place. Both saloons invite you to drive them with confidence, but the XJ has the edge in accurate, progressive throttle movements and easily modulated braking; the sensitive servo action of the 604's anchors can feel a little sudden.

The extra torque of the Daimler makes its acceleration more authoritative and effortless than that of the Peugeot, but there is less in it than you might think. There is not much point in using more than 3500-4000rpm in the Sovereign, at which point a remote if well-bred growl is beginning to disturb the peace.

The 604's silky V6 revs out freely, offering a slightly busy but not unpleasant sound. It changes gear more positively than the slightly slurring efforts of the XJ's three-speed auto – courtesy of Messrs Borg and Warner – and can summon its part-throttle kickdown more readily, so it always feels lively. Both cars are cloister-calm when cruising – wind noise is lower in the Daimler – but would be nicer machines with higher gearing.

The light engine makes the 604 well balanced front-to-rear and nimble on the road, with the feeling of something smaller and lighter, and it combines this sense of agility with a ride so good you wonder what designers have been up to for the intervening decades. It shares with the XJ a sense of indifference to bumps, potholes and noise-inducing surface textures that is uncanny. Carefully calibrated dampers are the secret (Peugeot was unique in making its own at the time), plus the aforementioned hefty bushes to filter out noise.

In this respect the Peugeot might just have the edge on the XJ, but the British car – with its uncompromising, quad-damped and carefully isolated rear end – has less low-speed bump-thump and, because it manages roll and pitch more effectively than the 604, tends to cause its occupants less disquiet when driven hard.

The Peugeot's steering has the weight and feel to make the car slightly handier. Jaguar/Daimler customers liked the light, slightly detached feeling of the XJ's otherwise pleasant helm, but drive briskly through a succession of curves and it can leave you guessing a little as to how quickly the understeer is building.

Both of these superbly refined 1970s saloons were created with an understanding that the

PEUGEOT 604 TI

Sold/number built 1975-'85/153,252 (all)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 2664cc 90° V6, Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection

Max power 142bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 160lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission three-speed auto, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by struts, wishbones **rear** semi-trailing arms, coils, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 15ft 5½in (4712mm)

Width 5ft 9½in (1765mm)

Height 4ft 6½in (1384mm)

Wheelbase 9ft 2in (2794mm)

Weight 3200lb (1451kg)

0-60mph 11.3 secs

Top speed 117mph **Mpg** 18

Price new £8299 (1978)

DAIMLER SOVEREIGN S2 4.2

Sold/number built 1973-'79/11,825

(including coupés)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, dohc 4235cc straight-six, twin SU carburettors

Max power 170bhp @ 4500rpm

Max torque 231lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission three-speed auto, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar

rear lower wishbones/upper driveshaft link, radius arms, twin spring/damper units

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs, with servo

Length 16ft 2¾in (4947mm)

Width 5ft 9¼in (1759mm)

Height 4ft 6in (1372mm)

Wheelbase 9ft 4¾in (2864mm)

Weight 3700lb (1678kg)

0-60mph 10.1 secs

Top speed 120mph **Mpg** 15

Price new £10,734 (1978)



From left: XJ is more potent on paper, but extra mass levels the performance; 604 is free-revving and agile

'Both were designed with a sense of finesse and judgement that predated an obsession with Nürburgring handling'



Boxier lines help to make the 604 easier to place on the road, but the Daimler's more imperious styling better suits the luxury billing



ability to connect two places at high speed with as little effort but as much pleasure as possible – for both driver and passengers – is the true definition of luxury in an automobile. They were designed with a sense of finesse and judgement that long predated an obsession with Nürburgring handling.

The XJ6 set such a high standard in so many areas, yet it was such good value that it made many much more exotic cars seem irrelevant. Pretty and poised, it is still an irresistible package in so many ways (if a rather familiar one) that it wins the sentimental vote because it feels not only so English, but also so personal to the characters that created it.

Not so the Peugeot 604: it was, and is, a fine car – perhaps the definitive big Euro saloon of its day – designed with absolute competence by the world's second-oldest car maker, yet lacking a crucial element of charm, Gallic or otherwise. Several decades after its demise, sheer rarity value makes up for this: fewer than

20 examples are thought to remain on British roads. It has become a symbol of futility and failure in the realm of overreaching luxury-car ambitions of 'bread-and-butter' marques that didn't know their place.

Yet the 604 was far from a straightforward commercial disaster. When sales of the model ended in 1985, 153,252 of them had been produced, making the big Peugeot marginally less popular than the Renault 30, if nothing like as numerous as the various premium-brand rivals from Stuttgart, Munich and Coventry's Browns Lane built during the same period.

The Jaguar XJ series remained the car to beat, even in the face of the better-quality German opposition. The remarkable thing about the Peugeot 604 is that, in the areas that really mattered, it probably got closer to matching the Jaguar than any other car. 

Thanks to HC Classics (hcclassics.co.uk); Robert Hughes Automobiles (roberthughes.co.uk)

Battle of the BARGE





In the 1970s, Britain's aspirant luxury saloons faced an invasion of exotic rivals from the Continent and beyond

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY**
PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

The 1970s was an era of increased homogeneity, yet in the world of large luxury saloon cars there was more choice than ever. This was a period of transition, the last hurrah for the traditional luxobarge before the status and snob value of Teutonic, engineering-led rationalism – in the shape of BMW, Mercedes-Benz and their legion of imitators – had begun to muscle out the cosily familiar big-car offerings of the 1960s.

The era of heavyweights such as the Rover P5 had come to a quiet end; names such as Viscount, Westminster and Zodiac no longer offered the resonance that had afforded them such respect in the avenues of suburbia and the office car park. It would be wrong to blame the demise of the barge entirely on the European trend towards smaller, neater luxury cars, with their efficiency and 'executive' vibe. The move towards compact saloons began in the UK with the Rover and Triumph 2000s, cars that conjured images of crisp-shirted young managers thrusting along the new motorways, leaving the barges of the past wallowing in their slipstream.

By the early '70s, bigger-engined versions of these models had to some extent appeased traditional customers who could no longer own the large-bodied 3-litre Vauxhalls, Fords and Austins of the 1950s and '60s. Those caravan-towing bargefolk who remained loyal to the 'value' brands, however, could now buy their big cars in a new, trimmer form – styled to look European rather than mini-American. Ford's 1972 German-engineered and built Granada was created in this new, more rational idiom.

Foreign cars were enjoying increasing success, and many moved upmarket to fill the vacuum with new, six-cylinder models that sold on the basis of value for money – if they were Japanese – or of being somehow inherently 'better' simply because they weren't British. The Volvo 164 is a perfect example of the snob appeal of owning a foreign car in the UK in the early 1970s, at a time when they were not much in evidence on our roads.

This cross-section from the classic barge genre – £2-3000 status cars when they were new – caters for every taste and mood for the buyer who, in the increasingly small-car-biased 1970s, still required serious power and luxury in a modestly affordable saloon.



Clockwise: deep glass helps the Ventora's looks; stylish rear chairs; long crank has only four main bearings, so it gets a touch harsh at revs; fake-wood paradise



Vauxhall Ventora

Safety legislation outlawed production of the Cresta and Viscount in 1972, but their 3.3-litre straight-six lived on in the FE Victor bodyshell as the Ventora, a name that was first used on a six-cylinder version of the FD Victor in 1968.

'Fully equipped' and costing £230 more than the VX4/90, the Ventora was something of a curiosity because it was thirstier but no faster than its four-cylinder sibling. It appealed to customers who put a high value on smoothness, quietness and effortless torque – its 174lb ft peaked at a mere 2400rpm. I seem to remember that lots of Ventoras ended up pulling caravans.

I would have deemed it worth the extra money because I have always liked this friendly engine, and in automatic form – as in Darren Kitchen's nicely restored FE – it has an easy time. Changes in the GM Strasbourg gearbox are almost imperceptible and there is a very pleasing surge to the acceleration, although it is running out of breath by 4000rpm.

The sheer weight of that 'six' rather dictates the dominant understeer of the Ventora. Still, there's enough torque to kick out the back end, and to some extent the power steering – not unreasonably geared at 2¾ turns from lock to lock – masks the tendency to plough on.

The Ventora is handsome and the RoStyle wheels, vinyl roof and quad lights give it an air of suburban one-upmanship. The synthetic luxury continues inside, with token wood veneer and all the instruments you would ever need in a fascia that slopes self-consciously away. The centre console, that status symbol of the 1970s, flows between over-styled front seats and the Ventora, more than any of the other cars here, seems like a piece of social history, a postcard from a time when our needs were more modest. In the lost world of 1970s expectations, it's the sort of car a First Division footballer – or even his manager – would have thought himself lucky to have.

VAUXHALL VENTORA

Sold/number built 1972-'76/7291

Engine ohv 3294cc 'six', single Zenith carb

Max power 124bhp @ 4600rpm

Max torque 174lb ft @ 2400rpm

Transmission three-speed auto, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, trailing arms, Panhard rod; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Weight 2860lb (1297kg)

0-60mph 12.8 secs

Top speed 104mph **Mpg** 20

Price new £1799

Wolseley Six

This was the ultimate 'Landcrab', designed to appease those buyers who would have bought an Austin Westminster or 3 Litre. It took the Alec Issigonis concept of a transverse-engined, front-driven and hydrolastically suspended saloon to its fullest extent, with the new option of six-cylinder, 2.2-litre power from a stretched version of the overhead-cam Maxi engine.

The Wolseley appears the most at odds with our contemporary conception of how a big saloon car should look, like an artefact from an old episode of *Terry and June*. The traditional grille gives the BMC 1800 a more attractive countenance, but generally this bodysell – admirably stiff and strong – resisted attempts at beautification. The short nose and tail leave a huge amount of room inside, with those in the rear seats faring particularly well: the legroom puts most modern big saloons to shame, especially in relation to the relatively modest outer dimensions.

The low fascia and Mini-like angle of the large steering wheel in Reg Cook's car feel unfamiliar, and that wood veneer looks rather at odds with Issigonis' austere conception of a practical people-hauler.

The engine is smooth but sounds pedestrian, with a lot of whine from the drivetrain, but the gearchange is better than the 'stirring a bucket

of bricks' imagery the earlier 1800 inspires. Heavy steering spoiled lesser versions of the ADO17, but in the Six it feels super-light and low-gearred if lacking in feel, and thus it masks the basically sound capabilities of a front-drive chassis that hangs on well.

The Wolseley badge means little to most people today, but in the early 1970s it still equalled refined fittings and affordable luxury. The Six, a staid and essentially municipal car, was perfect for a government official who had not yet risen to the level of a Rover P5.

WOLSELEY SIX

Sold/number built 1972-'75/25,214

Engine ohc 2227cc 'six', twin SU carburettors

Max power 110bhp @ 5250rpm

Max torque 126lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones **rear** trailing arms; hydrolastic spring/damper units f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

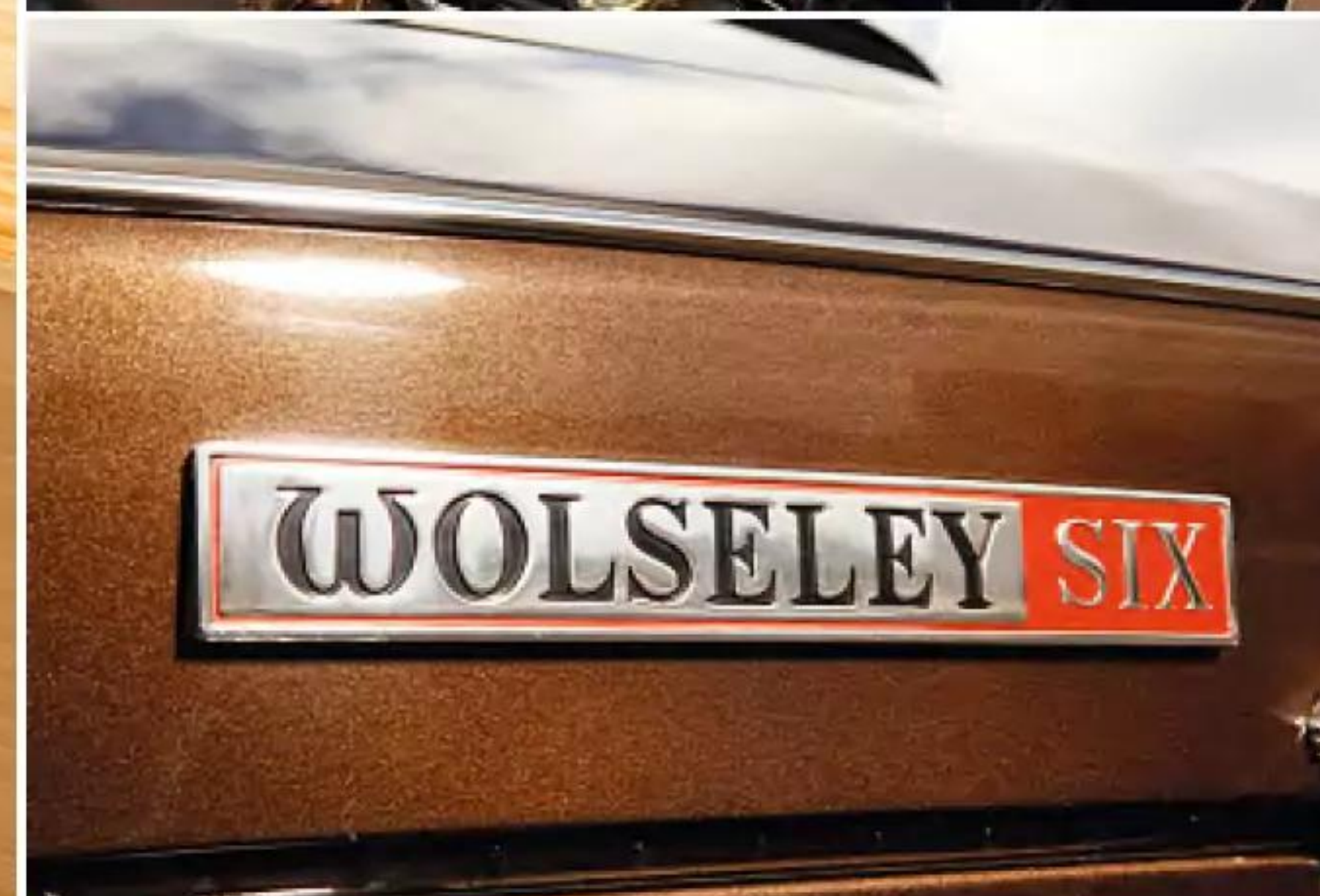
Weight 2617lb (1187kg)

0-60mph 12.7 secs

Top speed 102mph **Mpg** 26

Price new £1719.58

Clockwise: Six was the badge-engineered Wolseley version of BMC's 1800/2200 'Landcrab'; timber and cloth trim; transverse 'six' packs engine bay; stately badge



Triumph 2.5 PI

Handsome and lusty, the 2.5 PI has something of the character of a bargain BMW and, like the Rover, it shows how sound the better products of the reviled British Leyland empire were. The Mk2 was one of those rare styling updates that really freshened the look of Giovanni Michelotti's still nicely proportioned six-light shape and extended its life into the late '70s, and the mechanically fuel-injected version is the ultimate development of the theme. The Lucas system's not entirely deserved poor reputation meant a reversion to carbs for the 2500S. Charles Harrison has a fleet of straight-six Triumphs, and the PI was recently used on a trip to the Black Forest without a hitch.

Outwardly, this Triumph appears strikingly compact in a world in which even modest family saloons – never mind executive cars – are so bloated, yet it is very adequately roomy inside and flooded with light. The wooden fascia, with its segmented cluster of warning lights, was one of the best-planned you would have found in almost any circa 1970 car, although ultimately the PI lacks the detail interior refinement of the Rover.

On the move, the Triumph is as dynamic and driver-pleasing in character as the Wolseley (for instance) is pedestrian, with eager and punchy thrust from a straight-six engine whose howl suggests something much more exotic.

With overdrive on third and top, there are six ratios with which to play tunes, and third gear could take you from 20 to 100mph. One cannot especially delight in the Triumph's harsh and notchy gearchange as you would an Alfa's, but then you don't have to use it all that much.

It is better to focus on the fact that the PI's power-assisted steering rack is more direct than that of most of its ilk and that you can set your cornering attitude to neat or lurid on demand – it's a fun element that few if any of the other barges here can offer.

TRIUMPH 2.5 PI Mk2

Sold/number built 1969-'75/49,742

Engine ohv 2498cc 'six', Lucas fuel injection

Max power 132bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 153lb ft @ 2000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, optional overdrive, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** semi-trailing arms, coils, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Weight 2688lb (1219kg)

0-60mph 11 secs

Top speed 108mph **Mpg** 24

Price new £2189



Clockwise: the Triumph handles deftly for such a big car; overdrive gives smooth motorway runs; injected straight-six sounds glorious; clean, stylish dash





Clockwise: vinyl roof and alloy wheels were part of the luxury toybox thrown at the Ghia; plush velour; punchy Essex V6; roomy and rational cabin



Ford Granada 3.0 Ghia

Strictly speaking, our Granada should have been a 3000GXL, or maybe a Consul GT, because the 3.0 Ghia option, with its cloth trim and fresh fascia, was a late development in the story of the fondly remembered Mk1 Granada.

Launched in the spring of 1972, it was an important car because it gave Ford a flagship that was fit to be compared with almost anything, rather than a large car that was purchased merely because it offered good value. Many much more expensive cars struggled to match the Granada's high standards when it first appeared.

The MkIV Zodiac had been one of Ford GB's more public mistakes, being big and clumsy and not especially reliable at first. With the Granada, and its cheaper Consul stalemates, Ford sought to re-establish its big-car reputation with a more internationally acceptable design that would be sold across Europe and thus complete the process

of rationalisation with the German Ford range that had begun with the Escort.

It shares its Essex V6 with the old Zodiac/Executive, but the Granada is in a different world of assured cornering power and pleasingly direct steering. It has a soft ride yet doesn't wallow, and it feels so grown-up and capable that it was clearly designed with the Jaguar XJ6 as a benchmark. It is livelier than a Zodiac, too, with an earthy V6 throb as it winds out on loafing torque via the C3 auto 'box.

Bullishly handsome in an angular sort of way, its front end gets more identity from the Ghia grille treatment, but the GXL also has plenty of kitsch appeal as a throwback to the aspirations of the early '70s. The Ghia looks almost excessively tasteful with its broad cloth seats and restrained wood trim. This example, belonging to Mark Marsdon (he bought it via eBay the first time he ever went online) is a genuine back-up car from *The Sweeney*.

FORD GRANADA 3.0 GHIA

Sold/number built 1972-'77/846,609 (all Mk1s)

Engine ohv 2994cc V6, Weber carb

Max power 138bhp @ 5000rpm

Max torque 132lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission three-speed auto, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** semi-trailing arms; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Weight 3025lb (1372kg)

0-60mph 10 secs

Top speed 110mph **Mpg** 24.5

Price new £2204 (GXL)



Clockwise: bulbous styling shows clear Stateside influence; sporty look with matt-black rear panel; big 'six' shared with the 240Z; brittle plastics inside, but it still looks stylish



Datsun Skyline 240K GT

Datsun introduced the 2.4-litre Skylines in 1973 to plug the gap between the Laurel and the 260C, but there had been Skylines in Japan for years, the name having its origins within Prince Motors before Nissan's 1966 takeover. It offered great value for money, but the market didn't buy into the idea of big Japanese cars in the way it did the smaller ones, so 240Ks were always rare in the UK. This one belongs to David Silk, a Rolls-Royce engineer at Goodwood who got his apprentices to respray it in non-original white.

If you were being generous, the 240K could be described as a four-door 240Z. It has that car's straight-six engine, albeit in 130bhp form thanks to milder valve timing and single rather than twin carburettors. It looks a neatly planned installation in the roomy engine bay.

The point about '70s Japanese cars was that they came with everything you could expect for the price, and the 240K GT lives up to this with seven instruments on its pseudo-sporty

dashboard. Injection-moulded plastics are used unremittingly in the cabin, but there are surprisingly few of the florid embossed finishes that were a trademark of '70s Japanese cars. Thick rear quarters and low-set seating make the cabin slightly oppressive.

More to the point, it has an overhead camshaft and an independent rear end by semi-trailing arms, but these tend to raise expectations of a car that lacks something in personality. Neither is there anything especially 'GT' about the 240K, which has adequate rather than urgent pace that is shackled by a perfectly smooth automatic 'box when you feel that it deserves a manual.

With its high, curvaceous waistline and big, circular tail-lights, it is styled like a late-'60s US car, yet it has an appeal of its own – the brittle, fleeting charm of cheap friction toys you got at the market as a kid, where the picture on the box always looked better than the car inside.

DATSUN SKYLINE 240K GT

Sold/number built 1972-'77/700,155

Engine ohc 2393cc 'six', Hitachi carburettor

Max power 111bhp @ 5000rpm

Max torque 132lb ft @ 3600rpm

Transmission three-speed auto, RWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts **rear** semi-trailing arms, coils, telescopic dampers; anti-roll bar f/r

Steering power-assisted recirculating ball

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Weight 2579lb (1170kg)

0-60mph 11 secs

Top speed 112mph **Mpg** 26

Price new £1997

Audi 100 LS

Audi was still a relatively young marque in the early '70s, the name revived after decades dormant within the DKW/Auto Union group. When Volkswagen bought Mercedes' share in 1965, it inherited the Super 90, powered by a four-stroke, Benz-designed engine. The 100 was essentially a longer, lower and wider version of the 90, using most of the same mechanical ingredients in a more handsome, five-seater body. That this 1.7-litre, four-cylinder car – this one is part of Audi UK's historic collection – can apparently stand comparison with six-cylinder rivals of up to 3 litres demonstrates the quality of the design.

The shape already showed the direction in which Audi was heading. Neither as majestic as a Mercedes nor as aggressive as a BMW, it looks clean, neat, sensible and grown-up. It has aged more gracefully than almost any of the others here and is much less obviously an 'old car'.

And if the over-styled, pretentious cabins of some of the more jumped-up barges present are an instant turn-off, then the calculated simplicity of the Audi's interior, with its general air of Teutonic harmony, no ugly materials or tacky finishes, will have instant appeal.

Behind the wheel, it doesn't have quite the immediate satisfaction of the Rover or the Triumph, it has to be said. The tappety, rather harsh 'four' needs to be revved quite hard to

extract its performance via a fairly accurate four-speed manual transmission, and the experience isn't helped by the sharp clutch. Front-wheel drive should make the Audi feel a relatively modern experience, and it does have a sense of stability and security, but the heavy steering requires four turns between its locks for a 32ft turning circle, adding to the feeling that you have to put rather more effort into driving the 100 LS than you really want to.

AUDI 100 LS

Sold/number built 1968-'76/796,787
(all 100s)

Engine ohv 1760cc 'four', Solex carburettor

Max power 100bhp @ 5000rpm

Max torque 100lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones **rear** beam axle, trailing arms, Panhard rod; coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Weight 2407lb (1092kg)

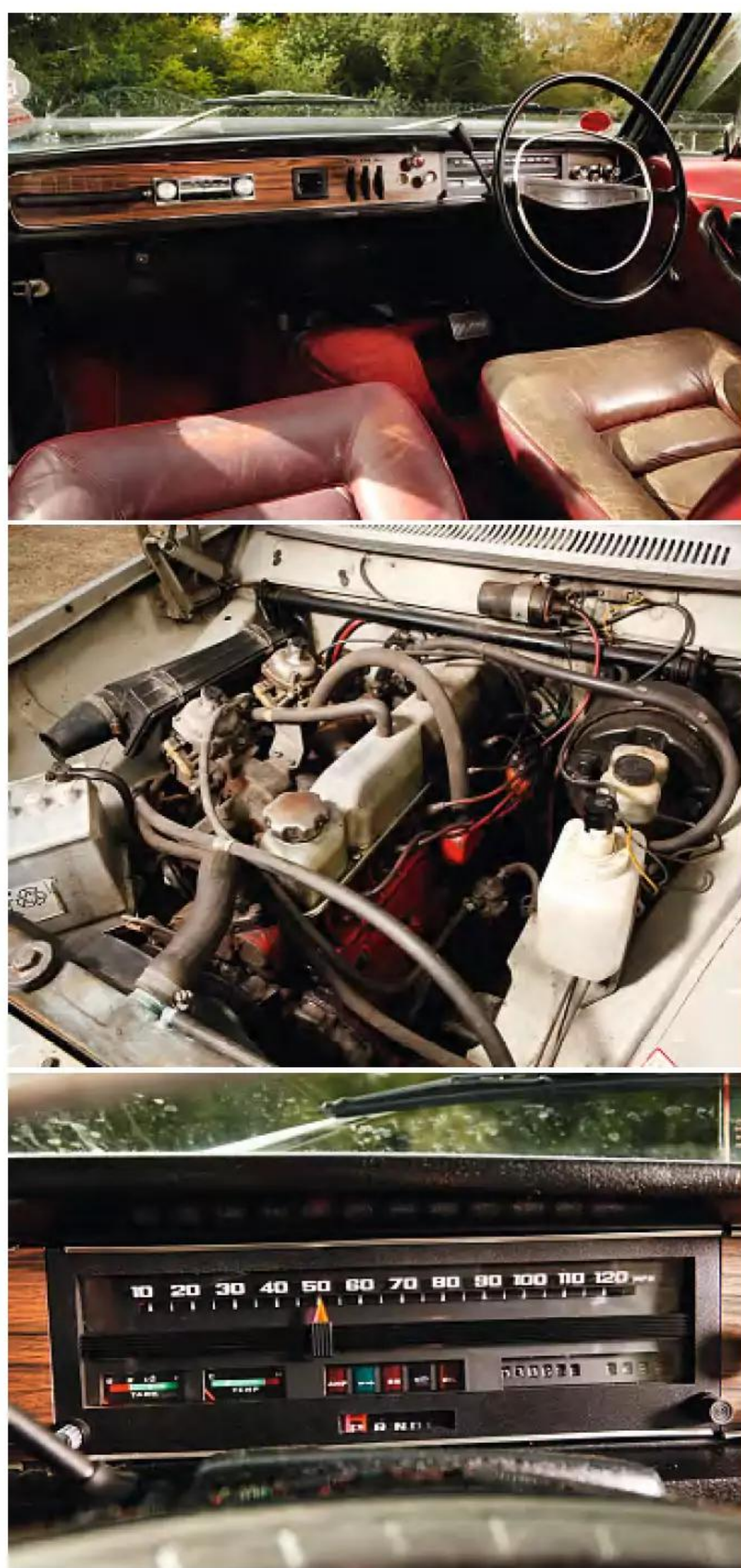
0-60mph 12.7 secs

Top speed 104.2mph **Mpg** 29.7

Price new £1938

Clockwise: the Audi's angular shape has aged well; simple, sensible cabin; smallest engine here needs to be worked hard; flat, roomy rear





Clockwise: longer nose and new face for the flagship Volvo; strip speedo; 'six' was also used by Marcos; added luxury, with leather for rational cabin

Volvo 164

Volvo produced long-lasting, rugged four-cylinder cars for sensible types who liked hiking and folk singing, so the appearance of the seemingly rather suave 164 in 1968 would have likely been somewhat perplexing for the traditional Volvo customer. Six thirsty cylinders, leather seats and power-assisted steering would have been an affront to the established customer base's more puritan sensibilities, but from Volvo's point of view it was a way to tap into a wealthier market using a car that had all of the marque's usual virtues, plus some refinement and luxury.

Not that the 164 was a revolutionary vehicle. By stretching the nose of the 144 to accept the seven-bearing, oversquare six-cylinder version of the B20 engine, the Swedes had in effect created an Austin Westminster for the 1970s. In other words, a classic barge.

Not that there is anything wrong with that. I always thought the pre-impact-bumper 144s were rather handsome, and the 164, with its large, square front grille, looks strong and distinguished on those now remarkably skinny-looking 165-section tyres.

To drive, it is a big, sensible car that doesn't tempt you to do anything rash behind its big, sensible wheel. Being an early, non-injected version, Volvo Owners' Club 164 registrar Roger Sampson's car offers performance that is smoothly adequate rather than inspiring,

with a remote but powerful thrum from an engine that was never used in any other Volvo; subsequent prestige models were powered by the joint-venture 'Douvryn' V6.

The ribbon speedometer and column shifter for the Borg-Warner automatic give a flavour of the '60s, but the latter blunts the effortless cruising ability that would have made the four-speed manual plus overdrive, with its pleasing change, a more versatile option. The seats are comfortable and hold you well as the body roll builds, and understeer takes the fun out of enthusiastic cornering activity.

VOLVO 164

Sold/number built 1968-'75/155,068

Engine ohv 2978cc 'six', twin Zenith carbs

Max power 145bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 163lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission three-speed automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, radius arms, transverse link; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Weight 3135lb (1422kg)

0-60mph 12.8 secs

Top speed 107mph **Mpg** 19.5

Price new £3450



Rover 3500S

Although the P6 was almost a decade old by the time the manual 'S' version of the 3500 appeared in 1971, the Rover maintained an air of superiority over its generally more superficial rivals. That two contenders here are from the same British Leyland corporate stable shows how confused was the big-car line-up of the soon to be state-owned giant. Personally, I like the original chrome-grille 3500 – or Three Thousand Five as it was called at first – and always thought the post-1970 jazzy wheeltrims, plastic grilles and fake bonnet bulges were a little beneath the car's dignity.

Even with the big V8, the 3500S is really more what used to be called a 'sports saloon' than a barge, and it fitted neatly into the vacuum left by the small-bodied S-type and 420 Jaguars. It rides softly and roll builds quickly, but the optional power steering makes the Rover feel much more wieldy than the unassisted versions. I can't help thinking the automatic

'box better suits the car's character, but with a five-speed from an SD1 (a popular conversion), the 3500S has a long and quite economical gait.

From the inside it feels relatively narrow and close-coupled, and it is a strict four-seater with those pleasing (and much-imitated) individually sculpted rear seats. The doors shut beautifully, plus it has highly effective face-level ventilation and ergonomically crafted light and wiper controls that feel different to the touch and glow a soft green at night. It says everything about this car that it is the only one here that is used every day by its owner, Neil Castle, who calculated that it would be cheaper to run than a modern.

Even without the silky pulling power and refinement of three and a half litres and eight cylinders – which really put the 3500 in another league from its smaller-engined rivals – the Rover would be a beautifully planned car that just makes you ask: where did it all go wrong?

ROVER 3500S

Sold/number built 1970-'77/19,896

Engine ohv 3528cc V8, twin SU carburettors

Max power 150bhp @ 5000rpm

Max torque 204lb ft @ 2700rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** de Dion axle, Watt linkage; coil springs, telescopic dampers f/r

Steering recirculating ball

Brakes discs, with servo

Weight 3002lb (1362kg)

0-60mph 10.2 secs

Top speed 122mph **Mpg** 22.3

Price new £2444.11



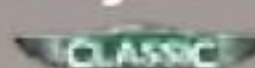
Clockwise: boot-mounted spare was an odd yet popular P6 option; clean dash and bright trim; light, Buick-derived V8 is a high point; switchgear glows green

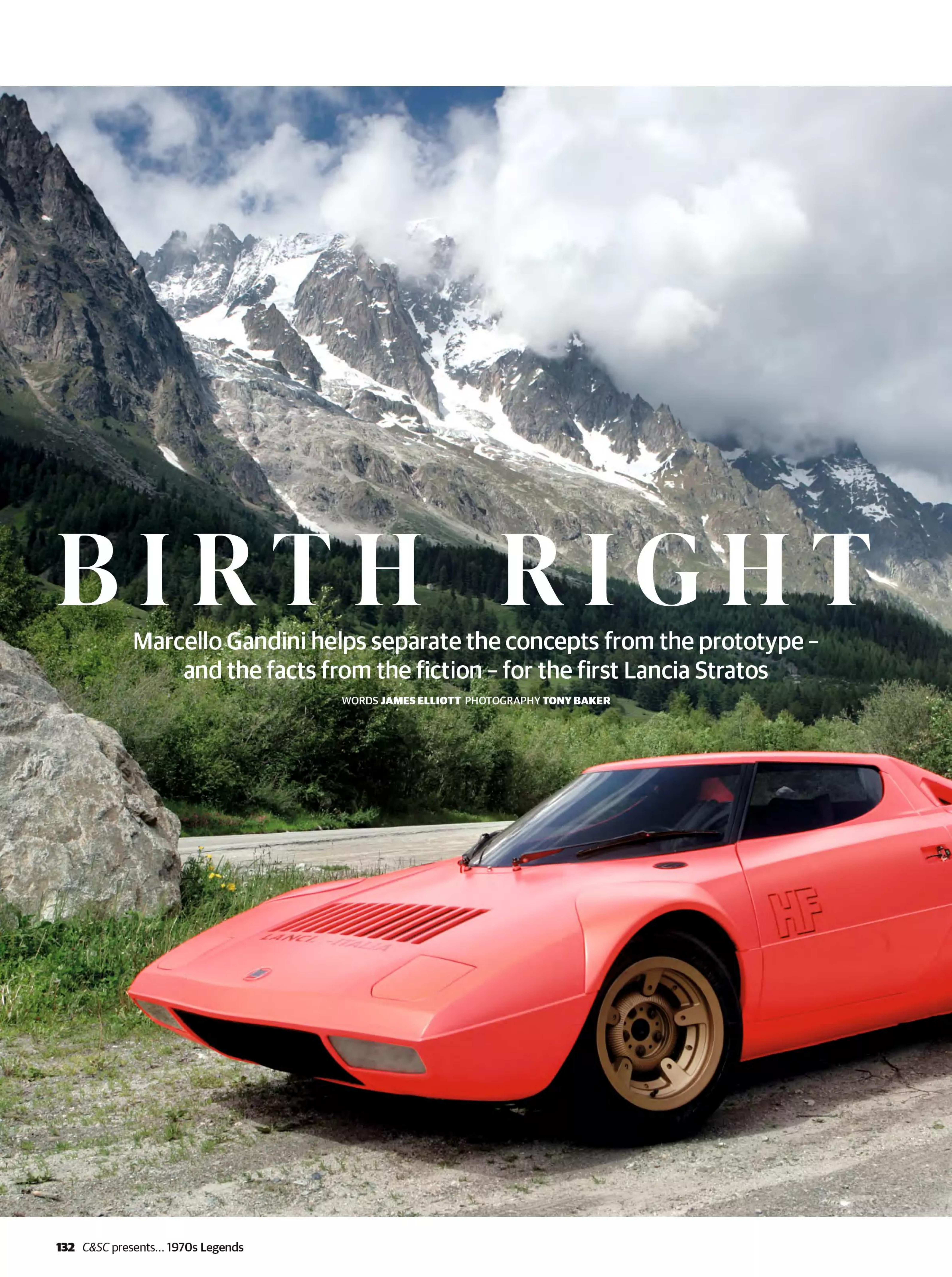
THE VERDICT

In a classic-car culture focused on 'fun' sports cars and all that goes with that particular fantasy, it is fascinating to get a close-up view of the big saloons that make up our relatively recent automotive past. They represent real variety plus the mores and attitudes of a society that seems like another world. Today, these cars' attempts at conveying authority, luxury and status appear almost touchingly naïve.

They get relatively little attention and in some cases face extinction; I seriously wondered when, if ever, I would see some of these cars in the metal again. Sports cars seem to get endlessly rebuilt, but 1970s barges are locked in a cycle of attrition as interest in them wanes and spares become, for many, difficult to find.

Feeling privileged to have them all in the same place at the same time, I find choosing a favourite difficult. The Rover, Triumph and Audi stand out as having best weathered the test of time, but they lack the kitsch appeal that makes the Vauxhall, Ford, Datsun and, to an extent, the Volvo such essential barge material. And yet the Wolseley, a product of the coldly analytical mind of a man who avowedly disliked big cars, has a strange allure.





BIRTH RIGHT

Marcello Gandini helps separate the concepts from the prototype –
and the facts from the fiction – for the first Lancia Stratos

WORDS **JAMES ELLIOTT** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



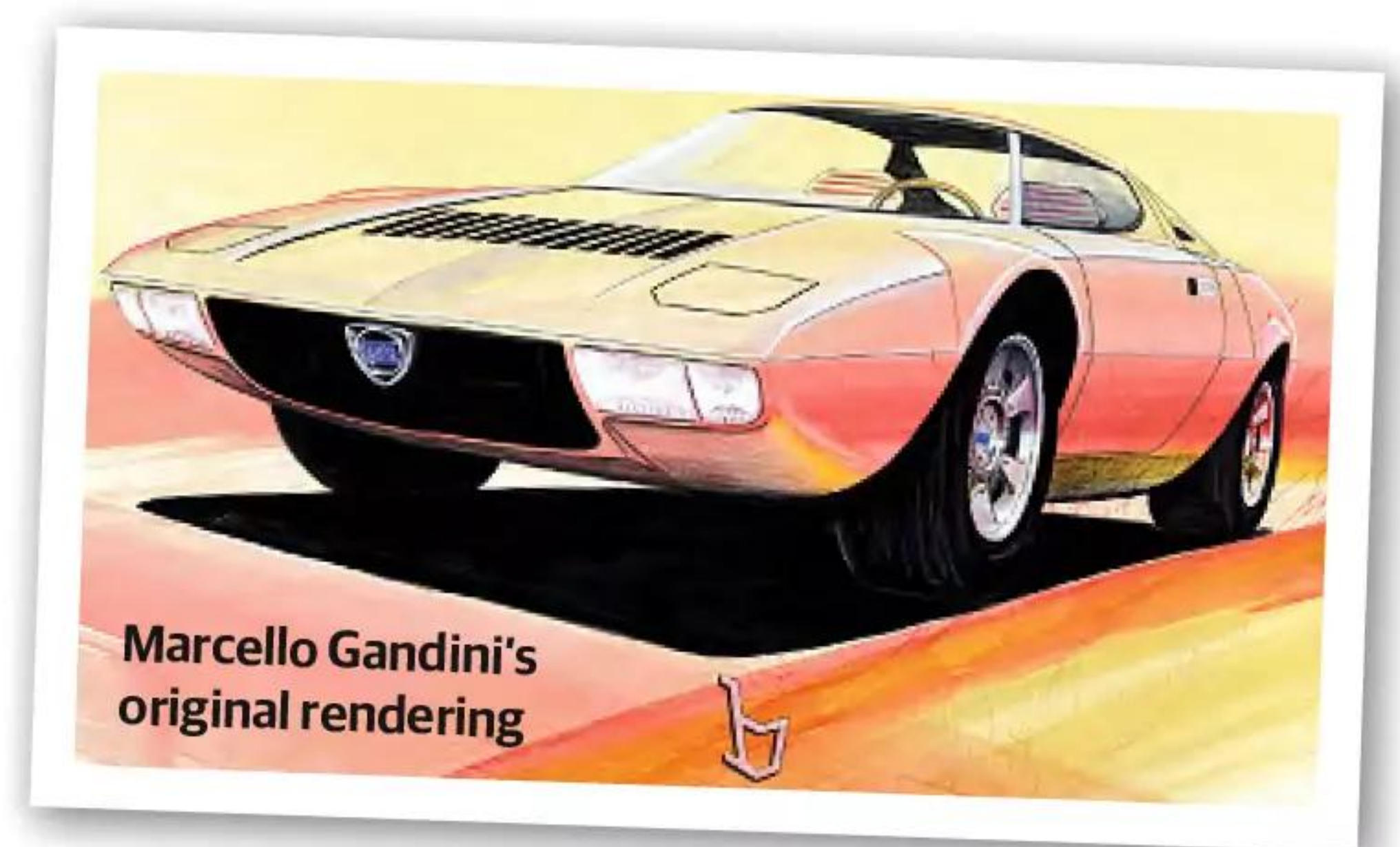
Perhaps it is simply the sheer outrageousness of the Bertone Zero concept that wills people to believe it has a direct bloodline to the Lancia Stratos. Certainly it is a romantic notion that the car that stole the Turin Salon in 1970 might have loaned anything to the world-conquering rally and road titan. With its rear-hinged opening 'screen' as means of access, mid-engined layout and bowling-ball steering column, it was awash with a futurism that stoked jaded imaginations as the '60s dropped out with a bad case of the munchies. Then there was its Lancia badging and acquired name: Stratos. Case closed.

Not quite. Look closer at the two cars that appeared to rapturous acclaim on the Bertone stand one year later – both from the pen of Marcello Gandini – and it is the Lamborghini Countach that appears to have morphed out of the previous year's concept car, commonly referred to as the '0' or Zero, rather than the then heavily redesigned Stratos prototype.

The man to solve the debate is Marcello himself, born in the 1930s, joining Bertone on leaving school and staying until 1980 when he went freelance. Marcello's late-1960s and early '70s back catalogue is littered with such beauty and innovation that it is rivalled only by Giorgetto Giugiaro. At times that rivalry crossed paths – will we ever truly know who should get the lion's share of the credit for the Miura? – but the list of Marcello's greats runs from Alfa Montreal to Maserati Khamsin and Lamborghini Espada to Alfa Carabo, the template for so many of Lamborghini's wedges.

Marcello laughs guiltily as the truth tumbles from his lips. Naïve preconceptions are rapidly dismissed. Preconceptions of Bertone's near-Teutonic efficiency and abstract creations coming to life slowly and steadily, lovingly nurtured from the drawing board through clay models and eventually to full-size artwork, all done in an ethereal atmosphere of unshackled creativity, are shattered as this doyen of styling reveals that Bertone in the 1960s was like any other business, desperately trying to keep its head above water as wave after wave of deadlines washed over it.

Given the circumstances, expediency ruled over efficiency, and this is where the Stratos myths were born. As Marcello explains with regard to the Zero: "I designed that myself



with Bertone and with one other person. We built the prototype quietly, without saying anything to Lancia, by using spares from a crashed secondhand Fulvia. The '0' was just made to create and attract interest. It was not brilliant from an aerodynamic point of view, but it certainly had a shape and a style that was well liked, and Lancia benefitted from it over the following few years."

More than that, the design was lashed up from an idea that been rattling around in Marcello's head for years, but it certainly made an impact. Rather too much of one, as it happens, he says: "Lancia perceived this new mid-engined prototype as something that could be developed and be made." Lancia's enthusiasm presented Bertone with a large problem. Even though *Signor* Bertone determinedly drove the Fulvia-engined Zero across Turin to Lancia to prove that it could work, he and Marcello were aware that the show-stopping concept could not be transformed into a viable car. Work started in earnest on a proper Stratos prototype, and Marcello is in no doubt that the second effort, which made its debut at Turin in 1971, was started on a clean sheet of paper.

And what a design it was. There are some beautiful touches, but not necessarily an understanding of what was required from a rally car. It also proved to be merely a template for production – when the prototype was finally restored in recent years, every panel and every component was found to be different. It is almost as if the design process was reversed: a skeleton show car is usually made more complex as it moves towards production, but the Stratos prototype was largely dumbed-down for manufacturing, to ease the process and to make it durable for rallying. Gone were the window winders and mechanism, replaced by a simple stop-lock dropping pane; gone, too, the complex engine-bay bracing that so resembles a Miura; and gone were such deft touches as the sill-mounted switches.

What is most remarkable about the prototype is how radical and provocative a design statement it was: not just the matt fluorescent paint (it was in this hue at Turin before being painted white shortly afterwards) and the state-of-the-art rubber matting, but the organic lines beautifully worked in aluminium.

View this creation from the right angle and the unfathomable depths of its Bell helmet-shaped 'screen' make it look like a black circle drawn in a square. Examine details such as the 'face', twin wipers, Fiat Dino dials or added-on wheelarches on the steel-tubbed, aluminium-panelled prototype – not to mention obvious flourishes such as the tail-lights and unique three-piece wheels – and it is clear just how



Left-right: the then-white show car at Bertone in period; the sensational HF Zero; early days of Bertone production line with front clamshell already in GRP

much effort went into this car, and how much it was changed for the 492-unit production run.

That, perhaps, was because there was another agenda: to deliver a concept would label Bertone as a design house, but a proper, production-ready car demonstrated ambition.

"We did not have a problem with the shape because rally cars then reached a maximum of 150kph on the dirt, so aerodynamics were not a factor," says Marcello. "The idea was to create an extraordinary design with a visual impact. Apart from the fact that the wheelbase would have to be short so it would be very agile, the theme was flexible: passenger comfort and storage areas were not an issue!"

Planning for the engine was not so simple. Even in those early days Lancia insisted its rally car would be powered by the V6 from the Dino, but Ferrari wasn't playing ball, so Bertone was presented with yet another headache. The designers initially used a Lancia Beta engine – indeed, the bumf on Bertone's stand had Beta Abarth engine data, but that was later replaced. Marcello explains: "The prototype was made secretly using a Ferrari 206 engine. It was like a miracle because no one from Lancia or Ferrari knew this. In reality, the Ferrari engine always gave less horsepower than the Beta Abarth. That little engine could deliver more or less 200bhp, but the two-valve Dino never gave more than 185bhp. In the end, the model was

"The prototype was made secretly using a Ferrari 206 engine. It was like a miracle. No one from Lancia or Ferrari knew"

made in three weeks over the summer of 1971 when most of the workforce was on holiday."

Less well known is that there was a second prototype. "We did it because we were not sure of Ferrari giving the engine," says Marcello, "so we did one with an Abarth engine and it was lighter and faster." That car – with a single wiper and MacPherson strut suspension at the front – was on Lancia's own stand in 1971.

Few details on the prototype jar, but the unfinished doorhandles and lack of body fasteners – production cars had Fiat X1/9 roof-securing items – stand out. As does the biggest loss: Marcello's dish-sized tail-lights that were to be replaced with off-the-shelf Fiat items.

After Turin the prototype was used for development and testing, but then it went into a museum and was repainted in Marlboro livery. There the show car languished until it was shunted into storage. Then, when Lancia had a museum clear-out in the 1990s, through

a complex series of deals the prototype ended up with a family of well-known Stratos collectors. And there it stayed until 2004, when they took the decision to restore it to just as it had been at Turin in 1971. The car was stripped and painstakingly rebuilt to original spec, even to the point of taking out development details such as holes drilled in the rear section.

Christian Hrabalek, who ordered the car's restoration – partly, he admits, so the prototype could sit alongside his own Fenomenon Stratos at Geneva in 2005 – explains his thinking: "I was concerned that the Marlboro livery was almost misrepresenting the car, pretending it was a racer when it was not and cloaking its true identity and importance. It is a work of art, and should be treated as such."

The result of the restoration is sensational, and Marcello's 1971 prototype retains an almost other-worldly futurism. To cap it all, it did get displayed at Geneva, possibly the only car ever to star at the famously forward-looking show twice, and certainly the only one to do so with a three decade gap in between. How many supermodels could dare to dream they would still grace the world's most prestigious catwalks so long after they first stepped out? 

Thanks to Marco Andreose and Christian Hrabalek. This story first appeared in C&SC in 2007; Marcello Gandini died on 13 March 2024, at the age of 85.



REINVENTING THE STRATOS

STOLA S81

In 2000, Stola contacted Marcello Gandini asking him to revisit the Stratos. Marcello didn't refuse, but found the need to echo his 30-year-old design limiting. "I would have preferred to do a new car that had nothing in common with the Stratos, because I always prefer to do new design," he says. "But in the end it was not too bad at all. It was never to be a real car – from the beginning it was always to be a static model purely created for promoting Stola activities. I think it fulfilled that purpose." Like the company's earlier Monotipo, the theoretically 3-litre V6-engined S81 (left) was a technical showcase. Intriguingly, the technology it promoted was nothing to do with motoring, but how the design process could be simplified and expensive-to-build driveable prototypes consigned to history.



SBARRO IONOS

With its wraparound windscreen and stubby footprint, the inspiration for Franco Sbarro's '97 show car was obvious. Built

with the blessing (and assistance) of Lancia, it was designed by students at Espera Sbarro and used two five-cylinder Lancia Kappa engines mid-mounted on a common crank, for a 4.8-litre V10. A four-wheel drive arrangement came from the Porsche Carrera 4 (as did the gearbox), and a roomier cabin was accessed via dihedral doors. Designer Mike Robinson recalls: "The Ionos was a unique experience for young kids with no design experience. Sbarro asked me to lend a hand. At Geneva, as soon as the Fiat brass saw the car, they ordered Franco to replace the Lancia badge with his own. He was so mad he stuck his badge on top of the larger Lancia logo so it was easily visible underneath."



Clockwise from above left: interior is more plush than the production car – note switches on rubberised sill; rear bracing is reminiscent of the Miura; prototype on the move



TRYING TO TURN THE TABLES ON TURIN

FENOMENON STRATOS

At Geneva in 2005, 30-year-old Stratos fanatic Christian Hrabalek unveiled his Stratos concept to promote his Fenomenon Holistic Design business and as a serious road-car proposal – and he didn't spare Lancia's blushes. Fenomenon used the very show models the Turin company had employed at Paris, sprinkled around the Stratos name – explaining to fulminating Lancia bosses that Christian had in fact registered it when he was 16 years old – and displayed the concept alongside the Gandini show car that Lancia had sold off a decade or so earlier.

Christian admits to a crusade to shame Lancia for its loss of values: "Everything Lancia stood for has been buried under badge engineering. It should be embarrassed to be offering rebadged Fiats. It is an insult to the DNA of the breed." Strong words, but then he feels so strongly that in the late '90s he started asking designers to

sketch a supercar that would be equally at home on Tarmac or the loose. In 2002, he got the sketch that would form 95% of the Fenomenon – and what wasn't from the pen of the unnamed designer came from the great Sandro Munari: "He suggested the central A-pillar – when he was rally driving, he hated having to try and see through thick A-pillars when he was sideways."

Christian dubbed his project Zero 2 and had it built by D3. He says: "It shocked people because it came from an unknown but was presented on the scale of a multinational. It is still my vision to see this car on the road by the end of the decade." But is that realistic? "Seven years ago I only had a vague idea, and that became a fully realised concept car within five years, so why not? Mind you, the problem is that the Geneva show really put Fenomenon on the map and got us a lot of work, so we have less time to dedicate to the Stratos project now!"

More power,





new ideas, wild looks... half the price

The mid-engined 365GT4 BB reinstated Ferrari at the forefront of supercar technology. So why does its dinosaur Daytona predecessor cost more?

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE** PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES LIPMAN**

This is a new low for a man to whom dignity is something that other people have. After performing a hernia-inducing 27-point turn in a rural petrol-station forecourt, all the while discharging V12 sound with Howitzer restraint, we finally dock our Ferrari Daytona by the pump. By which time the owner of the 365GT4 Berlinetta Boxer alongside has already filled up and paid for his fuel, and he is now grinning through a caffeine haze. Following such physical exertion, a lie-down might now be in order.

This vignette goes some way to propagating the same tired old clichés about the Daytona: it's a truck that even in period represented more of a nostalgia trip than a great leap forward. History also tells us that the Boxer was Ferrari's belated response to the glut of mid-engined Latin supercars that were emerging from upstart start-up operations in the late 1960s and early '70s. It would appear that it has always been playing catch-up.

And rarely more so than today, the Daytona being latterly cited as a marque landmark while also featuring in just about every 'most beautiful car ever' shortlist. The 365GT4, meanwhile, continues to languish in the older car's shadow – and that of the Lamborghini Countach LP400. On looks alone, there remains a sense that its praises are not being sung quite as loudly as they ought to be.

Great changes tend to have great side-effects, and you cannot underestimate the importance of Lamborghini's arrival in the exotica firmament on Ferrari's future direction: think of it as two storm fronts colliding. When introduced at the '68 Paris Salon, the 365GTB/4 – or 'Daytona' by its unofficial nickname – was met with muted hoopla. Tractor magnate Ferruccio Lamborghini had already half-inched the limelight with the buccaneering Miura, for which the term 'supercar' was coined. Observers of sufficiently hoity-toity stature railed against the new Daytona's lack

of daring. The Miura represented the future of big-power machinery, they reasoned.

All of which was quickly forgotten once the Miura's future-shock aspect was depleted. It soon transpired that it was nowhere near finished. The Daytona might have been less flamboyantly risky, but it *worked*. Underpinning the car was a steel chassis on to which the engine and suspension hung, with other, smaller frames supporting the radiator, unstressed body panels and floor. Unusually, this comprised a glassfibre tub, which also formed the door sills plus the front and rear bulkheads, all bonded together to make one unit. Over that, the artisans at long-time Ferrari collaborator Carrozzeria Scaglietti fashioned the bodies from individual sheets of metal, which were shaped over wooden bucks before being welded together.

And beauty here really is more than skin-deep. At the Daytona's heart is a 4390cc double-overhead-cam, all-alloy V12 fed by six gurgling twin-choke Weber carbs. According to the factory's own stats, this means 352bhp at 7500rpm and a thumping 318lb ft at 5500rpm. Despite the car emerging in an age when it was customary for manufacturers to, ahem, 'fine-tune' performance figures, Phil Hill attained 173mph during an independent *Road & Track* test in 1970. Closer to home, *Autocar's* road testers managed to eke out a further 1mph and recorded 0-100mph in just 12.6 secs while they were at it. Ferrari was in no danger of losing its throne in the top-speed wars. Not yet, anyway.

Joined by the ultra-desirable Spider variant in late 1969, the Daytona also had the bonus of competition kudos, which no Lamborghini prior to the Murciélago ever did. For all the bluff-calling and check-raising that went on between the two firms in period, however, nothing that Ferrari had in its armoury could



Clockwise from left: the classic GT cockpit, with reclined, vented leather chairs and very '60s feel; quad-cam V12 is packed with character – and noise; five-spoke Cromodora alloys with centre-lock hubs



*'It's seemingly all bonnet,
with one perfect arc from
pointy nose to cropped tail'*



Plexiglas nose of earlier car
is favoured by purists, but has
little effect on a Daytona's value



FERRARI 365GTB/4

Sold/number built 1969-'74/1285

Construction tubular steel chassis,
steel, aluminium and glassfibre body

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4390cc
V12, six Weber 40DCNF carburettors

Max power 352bhp @ 7500rpm

Max torque 318lb ft @ 5500rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, RWD

Suspension independent, by double
wishbones, coil springs, telescopic
dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering worm and nut

Brakes vented discs, with servo

Length 14ft 6in (4420mm)

Width 5ft 9in (1756mm)

Height 4ft 3in (1295mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 10½in (2400mm)

Weight 3527lb (1600kg)

0-60mph 5.4 secs

Top speed 174mph **Mpg** 12

Price new £9992

out-wow the dramatic Countach, even if it was essentially an exercise in mere titillation to begin with. For much of the early 1970s, the Countach was still in the throes of creation.

Yet for all that is written about Enzo Ferrari steadfastly refusing to 'put the horse before the cart', he had already produced a mid-engined road car via the standalone Dino brand. The first Ferrari-badged middie, however, would be a very different beast. Trumpeted at the 1971 Turin motor show and displayed in production-ready form at the Paris Salon two years later, the 365GT4 Berlinetta Boxer broke with typical Maranello practice by featuring a new, longitudinally sited 4.4-litre 'flat' – or 'boxer' – 12-cylinder engine, based in part on the 312B Grand Prix unit. Yet while its configuration offers the advantage of a low centre of gravity, it could be argued that all the benefit was negated by having the transaxle beneath the engine, offset from the centre line.

It packed an alleged 380bhp at 7200rpm, and Ferrari talked up a top speed of around 175mph and 0-60mph in 5.4 secs. This may have been a mite fanciful – 360bhp was more realistic – but the men in Maranello weren't finished. In 1976 the 365 morphed into the 4929cc 512BB, the extra displacement not correlating to extra horsepower, although there was a 10% rise in torque. Yet by the time the Berlinetta Boxer made way for the Testarossa in 1984, it had lost its quartet of Webers and 10bhp to emissions-friendly Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection: the BBi was more tractable, but less urgent as a result.

What is telling is that the Boxer's outline remained virtually unchanged throughout, and didn't suffer any of the indignities heaped upon the Countach towards the end of its life. Some 387 GT4 BBs were made, this example being one of 58 in right-hand drive. Ordered new by Mr Maranello Concessionaires himself, Col Ronnie Hoare, it looks truly magnificent in Blu Chiaro over black. It appears remarkably compact by modern supercar standards, too. The minimal rear overhang helps, but it is the detailing that really captivates – such as

the vast, amber front indicators and those swollen rear wheelarches. It's gorgeous.

But then so, too, is the classic Daytona. It's seemingly all bonnet, with one perfect arc sweeping from pointy nose to cropped tail, the taut roofline curving ever so gently around the shallow side glazing. Nothing interrupts the airflow, with wipers concealed beneath a lip at the base of the windscreen and tiny doorhandles all but invisible at the top of the beltline. Once owned by 1980s Aston Martin saviour Victor Gauntlett, this car features Plexiglas-encased lights that predate the early-'71 pop-ups facelift. To some members of this parish, it looks all the better for it.

Unlike the BB, the Daytona is easy to get into – this is a GT car, after all. You instantly feel at home, thanks in part to the panorama afforded by the expansive glasshouse and spindly pillars. That said, the scuttle is high, and the final few acres of bonnet do slope away into a different postcode, but the seating position isn't compromised. The wheel is rather large, but this does at least mean you can see all eight handsome Veglia instruments bundled together in their hooded pod. It feels intimate, even practical.

If the exterior dazzle is a representation of golden-hued 1970s glamour, the BB's cabin is even more of its time. From the groovy dials with their garish orange calibrations to the Cubist dashboard, it couldn't be from any other decade. It's not exactly spacious, but neither does it lend a tight, phobic, elbowy feel. Your driving pose is a touch skewed, but that rather goes with the supercar territory. The seats offer little adjustment, which means that the steering wheel almost sits on your lap, while the pedals are offset to the left. But you barely notice after a while, and it isn't wearing if you are of average height, even after several hours' driving.



Clockwise from left: huge indicators stand out against the blue; shallow engine sits high over transmission; classic open gearbox gate



*'With minimal rear overhang,
the BB is remarkably compact
by modern standards'*



BB would originally have had six peashooter tailpipes to match sextet of tail-lights



It could only be a 1970s Ferrari, with a more 'digital' feel than the 1960s Daytona design

FERRARI 365GT4 BB

Sold/number built 1973-'76/387

Construction tubular steel chassis, steel, aluminium and glassfibre body

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4391cc flat-12, four triple-choke Weber carburettors

Max power 380bhp @ 7200rpm

Max torque 302lb ft @ 3900rpm

Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs (twin at the rear), telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 14ft 3in (4359mm)

Width 5ft 11in (1801mm)

Height 3ft 8in (1120mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 2in (2499mm)

Weight 3470lb (1551kg)

0-60mph 6.5 secs

Top speed 171mph **Mpg** 11

Price new £15,492



One of the joys of older Ferraris is the initial theatrics: the whirr of the starter, that first cough, and the sound of Cerberus working itself into a lather. The Daytona's throttle is firm, but not stiff, and the steering is incredibly heavy when you're manoeuvring. Once up and running, though, you're astounded by the V12's flexibility: more than two-thirds of peak torque is available from just 1000rpm. At any speed, in any gear, the Daytona simply bolts.

All too often, ancient exotics don't live up to the billing. Being mugged by a hot hatchback can be humbling when you're in something multi-cylindereed and vowel-laden, but on Welsh back-roads the Daytona is in its element. It still feels genuinely rapid: with all six Webers working in harmony, it's one long, sustained rush. In period, the Daytona could apparently reach 59mph in first, 86mph in second. This is entirely believable. Once the transaxle oil is warmed, the gearchanges are a doddle, too, and the slender, chromed lever slots neatly into place without snatching.

The real revelation is just how easy it is to drive. Yes, the controls are initially leaden, but the accelerator, brake and clutch are equally weighted: once rolling, it isn't intimidating. And, while it doesn't exactly feel light-footed, it isn't without agility. The ride quality is far from kidney-rattling, and roll appears more pronounced from the outside than from the driver's seat. It corners well considering its age and size: the Daytona may be a bit on the hefty side, but it's nicely balanced.

It's something that those said to be in the know claim cannot be said of the Berlinetta Boxer. Yet, much like the Daytona, it appears to shed weight the faster you go and is similarly choral – only more so. Here running a later 512BB four-pipe set-up rather than the original six peashooters, it emits a giddy shriek at speed. This eye-widening battle cry has an extreme foreignness compared with today's supercars, with their flat-plane-crank parps.

Again like its predecessor, this isn't a car that thrives on being brutalised from standstill. The clutch is laughably heavy and the gearchange clunky, but at high(ish) two-figure speeds it comes to life. This impeccable example is beautifully set up and pulls hard into the upper reaches of the rev range. And while it doesn't glide over bumps, the BB is softly sprung, and there are none of the tramlining shenanigans you get with so many of its ilk.

Then you arrive at a corner. At this juncture, it should start flailing wildly: that is what legend would have you believe, but, honestly, it's hard to see what all the fuss is about. Go slow-in, fast-out and the BB handles beautifully. The steering does not have the telepathic feedback of a Dino – and it does writhe a little should you traverse a bump – but there's plenty of feel, and some way south of ten tenths it's hugely enjoyable. The brakes work more than once, too. Trackside it may be a different story – the high-mounted engine and narrow track will likely exert greater influence on your direction of travel than is ideal – but in the real world the Boxer won't bite.

Both of these cars have their fortes and their failings, and neither raised bars nor moved any goalposts. Yet, unlike so many of their contemporaries, the Daytona and BB didn't outstay their welcomes. The Daytona suffered in comparison with the Miura, its '68 arrival being a triumph stripped of euphoria, but it was misjudged for all of a few months.

The BB is that rarest of things: an underrated Ferrari; one that has unobtrusively faded into the background in supercar lore. It isn't a racer by any stretch, but it is relatively civilised and has looks to die for. Drive a sorted one and you feel more than you can possibly say – which is what great Ferraris are all about. It's perfectly imperfect, and overdue greater respect. 

Thanks to *Iain Tyrrell Classic Cars (01244 535000; iaintyrrell.co.uk)*

ON THE TRACK

In the grand scheme of things, the 365GTB/4 Competizione was not a prominent racing Ferrari. It was, however, more successful than its unlikely foundations might suggest. Driven by a roll-call of aces, from Derek Bell to Arturo Merzario and Bob Wollek to Al Unser Jnr, it continued to garner results long after road-car production had ended in 1973. As late as 1979, a decade after the venerable Daytona first ventured trackside, it was still a contender – witness John Morton and Tony Adamowicz's surprise second overall in that year's Daytona 24 Hours. Some 15 lightweight competition cars were made in three distinct batches, all varying in detail and degrees of weight-saving, and the Daytona claimed its Le Mans class honours from 1971-'74.

The 365GT4 BB, meanwhile, did not hit the mark so squarely. Predating any official factory involvement, Luigi Chinetti's North American Racing Team fielded an in-house-built car in selected US events in 1975, placing sixth in the Sebring 12 Hours. Plans to run a sister car in that year's Le Mans came to nought after Chinetti pulled all of his entries following an eligibility dispute over the team's 308GT4 LM.

IN THE MARKET*



"A UK right-hooker Daytona will cost £200k," says supercar guru Iain Tyrrell. "The problem is that once a price is set, people take

it as a benchmark and ask the same for below-par cars. The trick is to find the good ones! Prices are stronger for LHD cars in Europe, with good Daytonas finding upwards of £250k. There is no price differential between Plexiglas cars and ones with pop-up lights; it's a matter of personal taste.

"The BB is still undervalued. Think of it as an updated, grown-up Dino with twice the power and it's cheap. Trouble is, many of these cars haven't been kept properly. It's a surprisingly challenging car to keep beautifully set up, which means some of the driving magic can be lost, and this can affect their values. The earlier Boxers are the fastest and the best, but that is subjective and I'm not convinced the market has yet caught on to that."

*'Like the Daytona, the BB seems
to shed weight with speed
and is similarly choral'*



The world's most usable supercar?

Launched in 1975, the Porsche 911 turbo offers an unrivalled combination of performance and practicality. And it's still guaranteed to thrill

WORDS **GRAEME HURST** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**





Have you ever considered where the performance car world would be without homologation? The need for vehicle manufacturers to demonstrate that their race-track technology was production-car driven has resulted in dozens of unforgettable vehicles. Just imagine how much poorer our hobby would be without the rally-conquering Lancia HF Stratos and Delta Integrale, the *über-cool* BMW 'Batmobile' or Giugiaro's sublime M1? Or if Ford's Escort Twin Cam, its big brother Capri RS 3100 and a host of Cossies had never hit the streets? And let's not forget the pinnacle of the classic car world, the seminal Ferrari 250GTO. Yep, the requirement to build a minimum number of road machines before the model could do battle on circuit or stage has led to some sensational street cars.

Few, however, became so mainstream or offered such a step-change in performance as the Porsche 911 turbo. When the engineers in Zuffenhausen added a colossal KKK turbocharger to the already long-running and popular 911 in order to homologate the development of the 934 and 935 racing versions, their 260bhp, 150mph-plus result exploded onto the scene, instantly propelling Porsche into the supercar league. Here was a rear-engined coupé in which *Motor* testers could hit 60mph from rest in six seconds flat, yet it could offer seating for kids in the rear, plus ride and interior comfort that was on a par with those of the regular 911. No supercar before had been so utterly civilised.

As with many a homologation special, what started out as a track-driven development exercise quickly became a mainstay production model. Long before Porsche had churned out the necessary 400 cars to comply with FIA rules, the firm's chairman, Ernst Fuhrmann, knew that the turbo needed to become the company's flagship model. Today, the 911 turbo remains at the pinnacle of the sports-car tree in both performance and kudos. What's more, the original G-series cars (manufactured from 1975 to '88) offer sensational value for money. The marque's reputation for thorough engineering and build quality also means you can enjoy one without the 'take out a second mortgage to fix it' fear that so often blights ownership of Italian alternatives.

The turbo's origins lie in Porsche's successful Can-Am campaign and the advent of the Fuel Crisis, which led to engine-capacity changes that outlawed its mighty 917. As a result, Stuttgart looked to turbocharging its recently introduced Carrera for Group 4 (GT) and Group 5 (World Championship) sports-car racing. Several small-capacity variants were successfully developed before the attention turned to a production take on the already impressive Carrera 3.0.

The key ingredient for the new 911 was the KKK (Kühnle, Kopp & Kausch) turbocharger, which boosted the intake gases on the 2994cc flat-six up to 0.8bar. The engine was otherwise largely unchanged, apart from featuring a reduced 7:1 compression ratio (from 8.5:1) and a larger cooling fan. New, too, was the four-speed manual transmission. The lack of a fifth ratio appeared a retrograde step, but engineers



Left: cabin is largely as the Carrera 3.0, with the notable exception of a boost gauge. Below: chromed handles, mirrors, window frames and headlight rims were replaced by matt black early in 1975





Second-gear corner with a slippery surface demands full concentration as the turbocharger delivers max boost to the rear wheels at just shy of 4000rpm

found that the Type 915 gearbox (as fitted to the Carrera) was at its limit in racing, and they feared that the added thump of the turbo would lead to problems. A four-speed 'box allowed for wider (and thus stronger) gears to handle it all, while the locomotive-like levels of torque delivered by the turbocharger rendered any additional ratios almost superfluous.

There were several obvious styling changes, starting with the 'whale-tail' rear spoiler. Although this had been a trademark of the 1974 RS, for the turbo it was needed to aid the release of additional engine heat and to keep the rear end anchored to the road; Porsche said the aerodynamic device cut high-speed lift from 200lb to 50lb. Also keeping things in check was a deeper front spoiler, while wider wheelarches front and – most noticeably – rear gave the car a more aggressive stance. Strictly speaking, the muscular arches were more for show than go – the extra width was needed for homologation purposes, so the turbo used spacers to ensure the 7J front and 8J rear 15in Fuchs alloys filled

them fully. What the turbo did need for road purposes was improved braking, which was delivered by 11.1in front and 11.4in rear ventilated discs, although production cars didn't get the cross-drilled rotors worn by the show car in Paris a year before launch.

The turbo had big shoes to fill, following the success of the RS, but on its debut at Geneva in 1975, the car didn't disappoint. 'It may look like an ordinary 911, but the effect is shattering,' reported *Autocar* when it tested the turbo a month later. *Motor Trend* added 'nothing even comes close', while *CAR*'s preview story in December the year before concluded: '[It] takes

'Here was a car that could hit 60mph in 6 secs, but with all the comfort of a regular 911'

2+2 motoring into a realm previously only attained by the most exotic two-seaters.'

Those accolades weren't within everyone's reach, mind. At launch, the 911 turbo was a whopping £14,750 – almost twice the £7497 asked for a naturally aspirated 911, and nearly £500 more than a Ferrari 365GT4 2+2. The price didn't appear to matter, though, because there were no problems shifting cars. The demand was testimony to how much life was left in the original 911 concept, by that stage already 11 years old. Development of its intended replacement, the V8-engined 928, was well on its way, but the 911 still enjoyed a massive following. Owners forgave its wet-weather tail-happiness, limited creature comforts and firm ride because it oozed character – which the addition of a turbo served only to enhance.

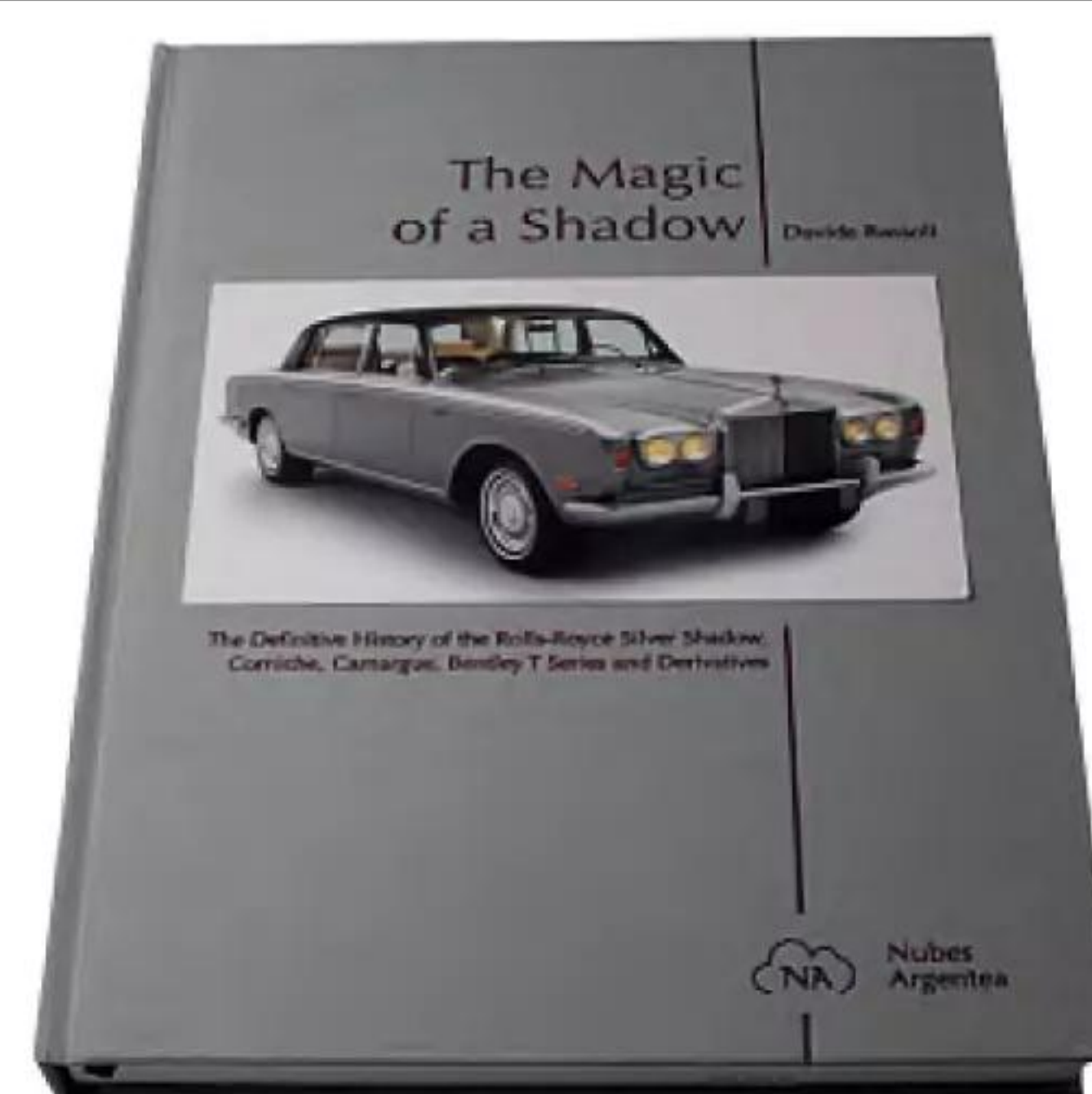
Although substantially updated, with the addition of Federal safety legislation-driven impact bumpers, the original 'Butzi' Porsche design is still recognisable in these G-series cars, particularly in an early, chrome-trimmed



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The definitive history of the Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow and Bentley T Series as never told before. The book **The Magic of a Shadow** describes the technological revolution of these cars introduced in 1965.

Specific chapters are dedicated to the Corniche two-door saloon and convertible, the Camargue and the other special models. The evolution of the Silver Shadow up to 1980 and of the Corniche up to 1995 are fully described. A chapter is made with previously unreleased drawings issued by H. J. Mulliner, Park Ward.



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example such as Chris Sherwood's mint 1975 turbo. It's a compact shape, but the low floor (you sit below the sill line) and deep footwells mean there's plenty of space, although the lack of reach adjustment for the steering wheel necessitates an arms-stretched driving position. Unlike in most supercars, it's easy to see what's happening behind you through the wiper-swept rear screen. Only the floor-hinged pedals take some getting used to.

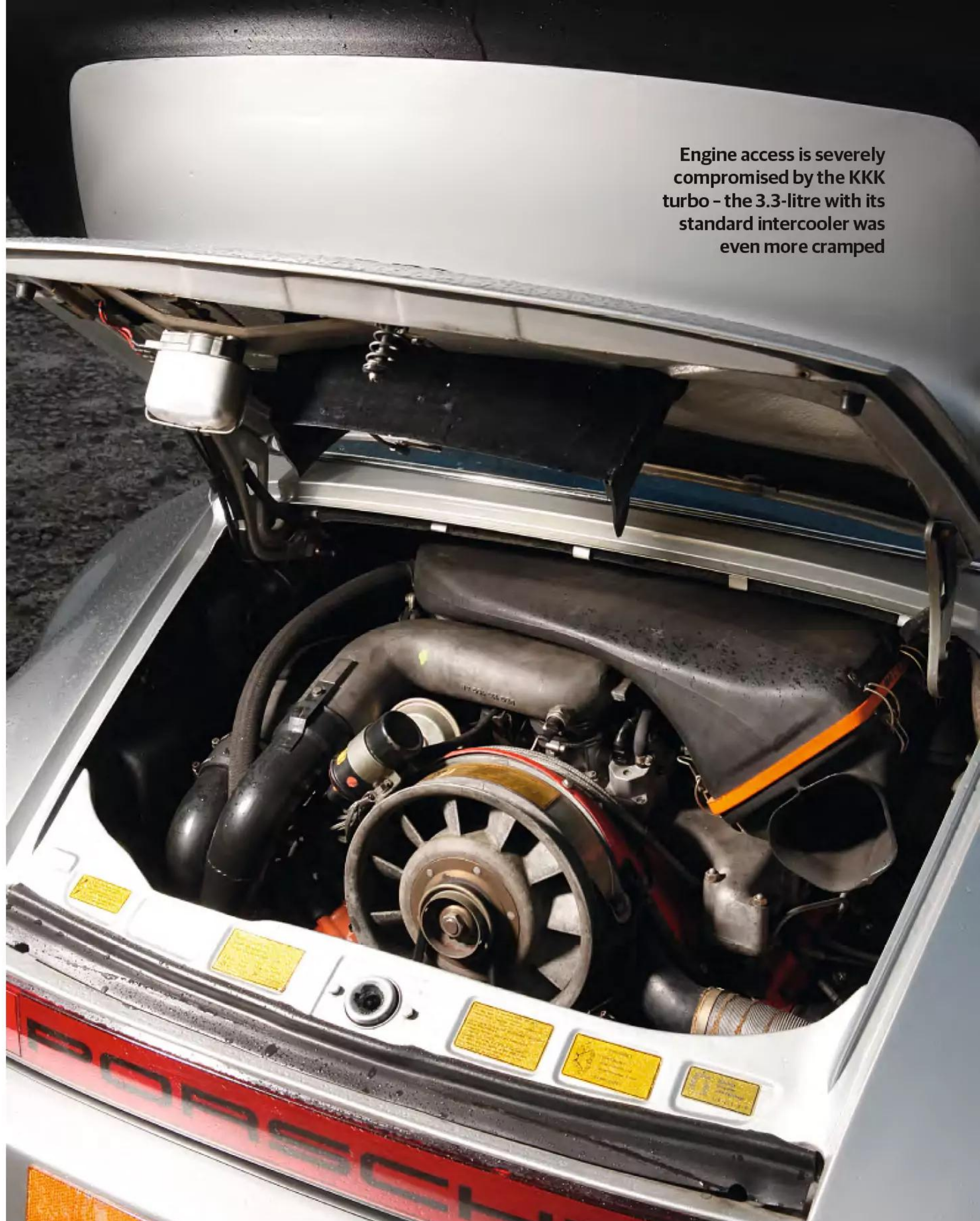
One characteristic the turbo doesn't share with its naturally aspirated brethren is its famous growl, with the turbocharger muffling both induction and exhaust noise. Fire it up and, in its place, there's a smoother, deeper song. It's less primal in timbre, but still pleasing to the ears. Let out the hefty clutch and this 911 feels just like any other: the steering heavy at low speeds but sharp, the suspension hard as the nose bobs up and down.

Bury your right foot, however, and you quickly get a taste of what all the hype was about back in 1975. As the tach needle approaches 4000rpm, you feel the thumping

'The turbo's gearing takes it to 90mph in second before the rev limiter chimes in'

arrival of peak torque as the turbo spools up to its heady 80,000rpm and gives the flat-six a kick like the afterburners of a fighter jet. The exhaust's throatiness becomes a sustained yowl and you realise why the lack of luxuries in a 911 are irrelevant: all you need are the central rev counter, the loud pedal and the gearlever. Nothing else matters as you revel in the engine's punch at high revs. Indulging in all of that performance is best put off until the brakes are warmed up if you want to avoid a close encounter with the car in front or becoming part of the scenery. Suddenly you appreciate why so many new turbos became insurance statistics. The gearbox is more rewarding when it's fully warmed up, too, particularly when dropping to second for a corner. If that sounds like a hindrance, bear in mind that the turbo's gearing takes it to 90mph in second before the rev limiter chimes in at 6800rpm.

Plenty to keep you entertained, then, but it's the turbo's phenomenal traction that thrills the most. The combination of 60% rearward weight distribution and wide rubber helps to lay down the power, but the old slow-in, fast-out approach to corners was never more



Engine access is severely compromised by the KKK turbo - the 3.3-litre with its standard intercooler was even more cramped

OWNER'S VIEW CHRIS SHERWOOD

Chris Sherwood's 911 turbo is a rare car, and it boasts an unusual history, having now been in his family four times. "It's one of 36 right-hand-drive 3-litres that were delivered new to the UK," he says. "My father, Clive, bought it from Swinford Motors in 1975 but sold it a year later."

Not long after, it was stolen in France and went to Australia via Italy. "It got false Italian documents," adds Chris, who has the forged papers in the car's history file. But Australian customs became suspicious about the car's right-hand-drive spec, given its Italian origins. A call to Porsche revealed it was stolen, and the 911 was impounded.

"My father heard about it and was able to buy it back from the insurer, then ship it to the UK," explains Chris, who bought the car from his father in 1987.

A year later, the running costs proved too high and he parted with the car but always regretted the sale. Then five years ago he had a stroke of luck when he spotted it for sale in C&SC, still with a mere 29,000 miles on the clock. It now shares his garage with some eclectic fare including a Dino, Aston Martin DB6 and Bristol 405, but the 911's pace thrills him most. "It has two personalities," explains Chris. "It can be docile and easy or seriously fast and entertaining on



demand." The car's low mileage has meant that little expenditure has been needed, apart from routine maintenance, a new exhaust and some minor oil leaks. "People say the gearchange is a problem, that the brakes aren't up to it and that sort of thing," Chris adds. "But it's simply not true if the car's been properly looked after."



Rear seats are usable for kids or fold to make a luggage shelf. Right: 911 turbo was offered with Pirelli P7s from 1976 (this car wears Michelins)

applicable. Keeping your right foot steady through a bend is crucial to hold the rear in check, and it's in the twisty stuff that the car really comes to life. With a push from the back, the front of the car is instantly more focused as the bobbing is reduced, the steering loads up and the chassis' agility comes into focus. This is when you start to realise that the turbo's DNA was formed on the track.

It's only when your pulse rate slows and the adrenalin dissipates that you appreciate the turbo's other impressive ability: its day-to-day usability. Fuhrmann joked that he had one on test for two years before the launch and his wife was none the wiser, and that's quite believable, so tractable are the turbo's low-speed manners. It's such a contrast with the car's screaming urge when pressed that the driving experience seems almost schizophrenic in nature.

'It was a marketing dream in the Filofax-wielding world of yuppies in red braces'

There was more to come. Less than three years into production, the turbo's performance got a boost with a capacity stretch to 3.3 litres. Power was up to 300bhp and torque to 293lb ft. Like most evolutionary stories, however, as those figures increased so the weight piled on. The bigger engine boasted an intercooler, which flattened the elegant whale-tail into the cumbersome 'tea tray', while the extra torque necessitated a new clutch design, which involved moving the engine back 30mm and in turn amplified the 911's tail-end weighting. Larger 205/55 and 225/50 VR16 tyres helped, as did bigger brakes, while options such as air conditioning and electric seats became popular – all of which extra mass pushed the 911's weight to more than 1300kg.

So it's no surprise to hear that the later car doesn't share the 3 litre's crisp handling or its balance, which was more akin to its RS 2.7 predecessor. The 3.3 might have plenty of punch, but it's more of a sledgehammer blow than the lithe 3.0, which is deliciously cammy in comparison. Not that such deficiencies were

a concern for Porsche, which simply couldn't build them fast enough. By the early '80s, only a Lamborghini Countach could rival the 911 for conspicuous consumption. The combination of the turbo moniker and its lairy styling made the model a marketing department's dream in the Filofax-wielding world of city yuppies bedecked in red braces.

The last and most significant change came with the adoption of the G50 five-speed gearbox in 1989, two years after it had replaced the Type 915 on the Carrera 3.2. Offering a much improved, more precise gearchange – albeit without much longer cruising legs – the new transmission was a particularly welcome addition. By that time, however, the entire 911 range was on the cusp of a substantial upgrade with the introduction of the 964 generation later the same year – with the turbo initially soldiering on in the same 3.3-litre form before being enlarged to 3.6 litres. Five years later, Porsche squeezed a last gasp from the air-cooled era with the 993, which featured re-engineered rear suspension to banish the 911's tail-happy reputation. The 993 also introduced all-wheel drive for the turbo, then four years later came a further radical change as the water-cooled 996 arrived. The concept continued to thrive, with the 500bhp, £101,823 997 turbo launched in 2009.

Those successors are brilliantly engineered cars in their own right, but they arguably lack the original's intense charisma. The same goes for many of the 911 turbo's rivals. For the same money today you could comfortably secure the keys to the world's finest Lotus Esprit Turbo or, if you fancy more pocket change, the 928 offers brilliant value and similar poke – particularly in 350bhp GTS guise – and is arguably even more usable. But neither option has the soul of the rear-engined marvel. To match that, you'll need significantly deeper pockets as you look to Italy and the likes of the Ferrari Boxer, Lamborghini Countach or Maserati Bora.

Each of which is very tempting in its own right, but all of them lack the 911 turbo's unique combination of genuine usability, characterful – if ultimately flawed – handling and the ability to blend docility with sensational urge on demand. It's an important model in the 911 dynasty, and although a vicious price meant that it was only accessible to a few when they were new, today the 911 turbo really is an everyday supercar for sensible money. 

PORSCHE 911 TURBO THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Although capable of high mileages, turbos suffer more wear than Carreras, and their complexity makes them a third more expensive to service
- All turbos are galvanised, but later cars were better protected. Check front inner wings, sills and rear wings below windows
- Beware of modified cars. Boost gauges aren't accurate, and over-boosting can lead to piston detonation. Rust can also compromise the oil lines between the sump and the oil cooler, plus the oil feed to the turbocharger can leak
- Gearboxes are strong, but the turbo's gears are heavier and third-gear synchro can wear prematurely

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01653 696181; specialistcarsltd.co.uk

911 Virgin 01895 255222; 911virgin.com

RPM Technik 01296 663824;

rpmtechnik.co.uk

BOOKS

Porsche 911 turbo 3 and 3.3-litre

Michael Cotton, Osprey **Porsche Data**

Book Marc Bongers, Haynes **Porsche**

911 turbo 1975-1984 Brooklands Books

Porsche 911 Michael Scarlett, Haynes

Porsche 911 Story Paul Frère, Haynes

PORSCHE 911 (930) 3.0 TURBO

Sold/number built 1975-'77/2850

Construction galvanised steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 2994cc flat-six, Bosch K-Jetronic fuel injection and KKK turbocharger

Max power 260bhp @ 5500rpm

Max torque 253lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, RWD via a limited-slip differential

Suspension independent, at **front** by struts **rear** semi-trailing arms; torsion bars, dual gas-filled dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 14ft 2in (4291mm)

Width 6ft (1775mm)

Height 4ft 4in (1320mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 5in (2272mm)

Weight 2703lb (1140kg)

0-60mph 6 secs

Top speed 155mph **Mpg** 18.5

Price new £14,749

FROM 930 TO 997: EVOLUTION OF THE TURBO



930 3.3

1978-'89, 18,379 built

A capacity boost to 3299cc and a standard intercooler yielded 300bhp and raised the G-series' top speed to 161mph. Cabriolet and targa versions were added in 1987, the five-speed G50 'box followed for the 1989 model year. 'Slant-nose' from 1983 had 330bhp with the performance kit



964

1991-'94, 5265 built

Same 3.3-litre capacity, but a larger turbo raised output to 320bhp and top speed to 168mph, with ABS to stop it. Performance kit from '92-on gave 355bhp, while lightweight turbo S had 381bhp. Engine up to 3.6 litres and 360bhp for 1993, taking maximum up to 174mph. Performance-kitted 'Slant-nose' returned for '94 (385bhp, 76 built)



993

1995-'98, 6696 built

First significant revision of the original 911 design. Twin turbos pushed output to 408bhp, giving 0-62mph in 4.5 secs and 180mph. Four-wheel drive and a six-speed 'box as standard, but only 14 Cabriolets made to special order. Performance kit gave 430bhp (later 450); turbo S from 1998 had 450bhp as standard. Wild 430/450bhp rear-drive GT2 (193 built)



996

2000-'05, 11,248 built

Ground-up redesign, with water-cooled flat-six and four valves per cylinder; 420bhp means 0-60mph in 4.2 secs and 190mph. Automatic option with the Tiptronic S, and Cabriolet returned from 2004. 450bhp performance kit, plus rear-drive GT2 with 462/483bhp (963 built)



997

2006-'12, c22,000 built

Prettier evolution of the 996 brought back the classic face. Power was up to 480bhp, top speed to 193mph, with drop-top and 530bhp rear-drive GT2 from 2007. Revised car launched in 2009 with the magic 500bhp



Famous 'whale tail' grew on the 3.3 to incorporate the intercooler; the 3.0 has a far more delicate style in comparison

wild at



These mid-engined - and cut-priced - Lamborghini Miura rivals pack a mighty punch from their race-derived V8s, but can they be tamed on the road?

WORDS **JAMES ELLIOTT** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**

heart



Motoring watersheds don't come much grander than the mid-engined road car revolution. De Tomaso has form, of course, the Vallelunga having kick-started the goldrush in 1963 and the Mangusta later bringing the power to complement the looks and latent potential. By the late 1960s and the dawn of the '70s, though, Lamborghini had stolen De Tomaso's thunder – and its sales – with the Miura. The word 'supercar' had been coined and the new genre already had its pin-up. It was time for Alejandro – and everyone else – to fight back. Even Ferrari, which still talked a good fight with the Daytona, knew the end was nigh for long-bonneted brute force, having already filtered the mid-engined Dino into the fold.

Few apart from Lamborghini were crazy enough at the outset to lob a transversely mounted V12 in the spot where you would traditionally have your umbrella lolling around, but V8s were a natural fit for a new type of motor. Most of the new breed came without quite the outright top speed to catapult the cars into the lofty strata of *Top Trumps* champions (the Miura's claimed 180mph still ruled there). These cars compromised those headline-grabbing figures in return for greater usability and better handling – a formula that considered a mere 160-170mph as plenty, and that drivers should be able to speak to their passengers without using headphones.

The glut of new cars usually flaunted their exoticism with vowel-laden Italian names, the two most intriguing and most akin to each other being the De Tomaso Pantera and the Maserati Bora. One an out-and-out hybrid, the other a virtual hybrid (by way of Citroën's takeover), this pairing shares layout, V8 power, a ZF transaxle, Campagnolo alloy wheels and, stationary at least, demeanour. Coming from completely different angles, but offering extremely similar performance figures, these were two very serious and genuine rivals to Lamborghini's hegemony, but at much more tempting prices. In the UK in 1973, a Pantera GTS such as this could be yours for £7875 and a Bora would set you back £9831, while even in the previous year the outgoing Miura was a heady £10,250. And in '73 it would be followed by the Countach at an eye-watering £16,314.

Argentinian Alejandro De Tomaso had originally developed his Mangusta to gorge itself on Cobras, the Vallelunga's baby Ferrari curves replaced with a new, menacing shape from Giorgetto Giugiaro. But the Ford V8 was too much for what was essentially the old Vallelunga backbone chassis (which originally carried a Ford Cortina unit), and the whole Mangusta experience was cramped and usually terrifying. That changed with De Tomaso's next offering. Although superficially similar, the Pantera was a very different beast to the Mangusta, with a very different beast in its sights. The Giampaolo Dallara-designed monocoque featured independent suspension all round and was dressed in a body by Ghia's Tom Tjaarda. It shared its aggressive stance with its predecessor, but little else. At 5763cc, the 351cu in Cleveland V8 pushing out up to 350bhp in GTS form (from 1973) was a whole

litre bigger than the Mangusta unit and found a much happier home in the Pantera.

The car may still have come from a boutique manufacturer, but its two-decade longevity (Panteras only went out of production in 1991) ensured that the Italian company finally got a taste of the big league by initially selling 1000 cars a year. This was greatly aided by De Tomaso's masterstroke of flogging Ghia to Ford, and thereby gaining access to Lincoln-Mercury dealerships in the States.

Maserati's first mid-engined road car was a rather better-resourced pot-shot at the Miura, clothed in a sensational skin styled by Giugiaro and with the engineering masterminded by long-serving genius Giulio Alfieri. It was the hyper-competitive Alfieri who was the driving force behind the Bora and who pushed it through despite internal resistance, not least from Ghibli-adoring chief tester Guerrino Bertocchi. Launched in 1971 after a difficult gestation that included the Citroën buyout of Maserati in 1968 – and meaning that it only shared a year in production with the Miura it was built to best – the Bora survived for seven years, shifting fewer than 100 cars in each of them. It was designed around the Modenese marque's fabulous 4.7-litre (4.9-litre from '76) quad-cam V8 that had been in service since the 450S sports-racer, with a quartet of twin-choke 42DCNF Weber carbs atop the vee.

The detailing of the car is some of the most beautiful ever, with those dished hubcaps on the alloys, the chromed moustache in the air intake, that sensational, satin-finish steel roof panel and A-pillars, even the rear windows that actually transform rearward vision. The

'You guide the Bora through switchbacks with deft flicks of the steering wheel'

Bora is a mesmerising shape outside and in. Even looking at the seats, snaking from engine cover to floor like a falling blind, you know that this car is not a case of style over substance.

It is an enormously roomy cockpit for what is a relatively slender car. From the driver's seat, everything is angled towards you, including the 200mph speedo and 8000rpm rev counter (with redline kicking off at 5500rpm). Everything is adjustable: why have a seat on runners when you could wire it into the hydraulic braking system, add a switch and move the pedals to the driver instead of vice versa? The seat height is similarly adjustable, and the combinations you can play on the steering column to get the wheel just where you want it are mind-boggling. It is a very comfortable and beautiful place to be and those are undoubtedly the best-looking seats ever installed in a car.

Turn the key and, surprisingly, those levels of comfort are left intact. The V8 is audible through the double-glazed rear window, but not intrusive, its sophisticated, complicated patter of pulses emitting a gentleman fighter's tune from the exhausts, the downdraught Webers feeding it in genteel sips rather than great gulps. On the move, it remains similarly unruffled. The transaxle takes some getting used to – it is easy to rush and miss changes at first – but it is so torquey and third so tall that you could probably do all your day-to-day driving in that gear. The steering is a bit too heavy at walking pace, but is perfectly weighted on the move and the ride and handling are sensational, one of the finest combinations of sporting responses and cabin comfort. Such is the grip that it's hard to believe it is riding on relatively skinny 215/70 VR15 tyres. Yet the fact that they are the same front and back definitely adds to the car's excellent cornering poise, allowing you to just guide the Bora through switchbacks with deft flicks of the steering wheel and not a hint of drama.

Then there are the brakes – Citroën's high-pressure hydraulic system, which is so efficient that it takes time for the driver to fully adjust to





Clockwise: rear windows offer useful vision; classy interior and gorgeous seats; hubcaps are fiercely expensive; race-derived V8 from the 450



MASERATI BORA

Sold/number built 1971-'78/571

Construction steel platform chassis with rubber-insulated subframes, steel body

Engine all-alloy, dohc-per-bank 4719/4930cc V8, four Weber 42DCNF carburettors

Max power 310bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 325lb ft @ 4200rpm

Transmission five-speed manual transaxle, RWD

Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes powered Girling discs

Length 14ft 3in (4343mm)

Width 5ft 10in (1784mm)

Height 3ft 11in (1200mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 6in (2590mm)

Weight 3416lb (1549kg)

0-60mph 6.4 secs

Top speed 160mph **Mpg** 14

Price new £9831 (1973)



Clockwise: engine noise intrudes more than in Bora; interior is surprisingly well put together; alloys add to Italianate pedigree; monster 351cu in V8



DE TOMASO PANTERA GTS

Sold/number built 1973-'92/7165 (to 1990)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-iron, ohv 5763cc V8, single four-barrel Autolite carburettor

Max power 350bhp @ 5400rpm

Max torque 345lb ft @ 4000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual transaxle, RWD

Suspension independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes ventilated discs, with servo

Length 13ft 11in (4241mm)

Width 5ft 11in (1803mm)

Height 3ft 7½in (1092mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 3in (2514mm)

Weight 3050lb (1383kg)

0-60mph 5.5 secs

Top speed 170mph **Mpg** 17

Price new £7875 (1973)





Both of these supercars will leave the legal speed limit behind without even troubling third gear

it, or to trust it. But it is excellent, even if the rock-solid pedal means you are unlikely to ever be able to heel-and-toe a Bora. Then again, that rarely feels as if it would be necessary. Owner Tony Bernstein has had this example for 15 years – barring three months when he sold it and promptly bought it back – and enjoys lots of track days and long-distance tours in it. It is easy to see the appeal: this Maserati is an incredibly good car, especially rare for its day and type in being one that is always travelling a great deal faster than it feels to its occupants.

The same cannot be said of the De Tomaso Pantera, in which any rolling speed feels as if it could cause your vision to streak. This rare, right-hand-drive GTS was sold not long ago by Anthony Godin who, by his own admission, is becoming a Pantera specialist purely by chance. Many of the recently sold UK cars have passed through his hands. He says that this original and unmolested example could be the 1973 Earls Court Motor Show car, and it is certainly a low-mileage and well cared for motor. Resprayed a decade or so back, it is in very tidy condition, but not so immaculate that you wouldn't want to drive it. Thankfully. It also illustrates how much more pretty – dainty, even – the Pantera was before it acquired all those ugly piercings. Tjaarda's lines are supremely eloquent, the profile purposeful yet delicate, the nose designed for splicing air, the tail squared off in perfectly period fashion.

From the moment you step into the Pantera, it is clear how far and how quickly the company had progressed when it started to sell proper numbers of cars. Except for the horribly out of place and too-small plastic steering wheel (Ford Capri?), it doesn't have any of the rickety feel of a hybrid, though admittedly it also doesn't have quite the exotic aura of the Bora. The interior is plush and spacious, a suede dash-top the first sign of quality, the seats comfortable and cossetting, the way the tunnel guides your feet to the slightly offset pedals not as intrusive as it should be. In front of the driver

are two big dials (200mph speedo and 8000rpm rev counter with redline starting at 5900), while most of the furniture is neatly placed in the centre console. It's not exactly poverty-spec, but between the two you can start to see some of the price differential.

The De Tomaso doesn't so much start up as erupt. If you are going to have a hybrid, it's not a bad start to fit it with a multiple Le Mans-winning engine and transmission, especially one you could buy crated. And that snarling, shatteringly brutal racing engine is the heart and soul of this car's appeal. It is gloriously unsophisticated, the single, massive four-barrel Holley carburettor on this car lets the engine chug fuel like a teenager at their first

'That snarling, shatteringly brutal engine is the heart and soul of the Pantera'

keg party, but it is so winningly straightforward that you can't help but fall in love with it.

The Ferrari-esque open gearlever gate initially feels baulky, but actually serves a proper purpose. By enforcing slower, more determined changes, it means that you are never rushing the transaxle and the shift feels far easier and smoother than in the Bora. From the dog-leg first, guide it upwards and the length of the gears astounds, with the legal limit flashing up midway through second, and third stretching just as far. Who knows where you would be by the time you topped out in fifth? Airborne, probably.

But these are considerations you don't have time to contend with, because you need to focus to drive the Pantera. Unlike the Bora, which allows the driver to indulge themselves in some relaxed high-speed cruising, the De Tomaso demands total concentration 100% of

the time. It is twitchy and skittish as it puts down its power, the steering is a little too light and prone to bump-steer, that cheapo wheel jittering all the time in your hands. The back end is forever reminding you how easily it could switch to autopilot and take the control of the car out of your hands. It lacks the quiet smoothness that the Maserati's innovative, rubber-mounted rear subframe affords the transmission. On far fatter tyres – with lower-profile 225s on the front and 275s on the back, even the steering tyres are bulkier than the Bora's rears – it doesn't have the grip or the balance of the Maserati. Though you can never relax in the Pantera – its ride is a good deal harsher, too – it doesn't make this bucking bronco any less enjoyable. It is one long dangerous adrenalin rush, like indulging in an illicit fling, while the Bora is like finding your soulmate. That the Maserati has the same performance, but goes about it with such unflustered civility, is astonishing.

For cars that have so much in common – not least their Lambo-lambasting *raison d'être* – the characters of this pair are so different that comparison almost seems pointless. A waste of time, then? Not at all. We had to do the story to discover that fact, and we learned a lot more besides. Namely that, for seat-of-the-pants driving and raw thrills – and, bizarrely, also for trickling along in traffic jams – you need a Pantera. Nothing comes close for the money. Yet for Continental touring with genuine pace, refined GT comfort and capability, the Bora is equally essential. Again, you'd have to spend double to find something that would make you feel better as the lines of poplars flash past on a deserted French blue route, or to get you over the Alps as quickly and comfortably.

The Bora has always been near the summit of the 'must-have' list and it still is, but has been joined by the Pantera. If you were thinking of buying either of these cars, the good news is that neither will disappoint. The bad news is that you really need both... 

Smokes & mirrors

Or, where there's a Wills, there's a way. The Ogle-designed Sotheby Special is an Aston-ishing glass and glassfibre take on Newport Pagnell's DBS V8

WORDS **RICHARD HESELTINE** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**





Mrs Mary Agate had the right idea. On turning 60 in 1972 she chose not to dwell on receiving her bus pass. Instead, this wealthy widow commissioned Ogle to build her a car, paying in the region of £29,000 for the privilege – roughly four times the price of a new Ferrari Daytona. And what did Mrs Agate do when she received her new wheels? She hired Silverstone for the day and gave it a damn good seeing to.

If money affords you the means to live out your dreams, then so be it. Trouble is, fantasies are often fleeting, and never more so than in the shaky arena of dream cars. The Aston Martin Ogle Coupé is a case in point. While this distinctive wedge was very 'now' back in the day, several decades on it's still fabulous, if in an all-knowing, ironic sort of way.

It isn't unique, either. Two were made – or, to be more accurate, two and a half. The project was first mooted in the late '60s. Following the death of David Ogle, his eponymous styling house flourished under the stewardship of Tom Karen. The Letchworth outfit reanimated the proposal in early 1971 after tobacco company HO Wills was coerced by Ogle chairman John Ogier into picking up the tab. For promotional reasons, the car would be named The Sotheby Special, after its latest brand of cigarettes. With further sponsorship from Aston Martin (which would later disown the car), Triplex, Lucas and others, the Special was to act as a platform for new ideas and be displayed within an all-British showcase at the 1972 Montreal motor show.

The car, a standard DBS V8 beneath the skin, was constructed of glassfibre – crafted by the imaginatively titled Fibreglass Ltd – as far as the waistline, above which it was entirely of glass supported by a steel frame that doubled as roll-over protection. In an effort to prevent the sun's harmful rays from slow-baking the occupants, Triplex Sundym glass, gold banded on the inside, was used forward of the centre roll hoop, with green-hued Lennig Oroglass to the rear. The glasshouse was bonded to the structure, and further arcs of steel tubing framed the dash and centre console.

Karen let rip his imagination, capitalising on the reflections cast in the windscreen by mounting a menagerie of warning lights flat above the cowled speedometer and rev counter to give a sort of primitive head-up display, complete with mirror-image labels. Behind the front seats lay a *chaise longue* trimmed, like the rest of the cabin, in green corduroy. But the undoubted *pièce de résistance* was the stainless-



'This is exactly what dream cars are meant to be like: daring, and ever so slightly barking'

steel-encased rump, home to no fewer than 22 tail-lights that, while whimsical in appearance, masked a more serious intent. Indicators lit up sequentially from the centre outwards; braking intensity was signalled by the number of lights that lit up, six equating to an emergency stop.

In truth, the Montreal debutant was little more than a body buck – or ‘the half’; the definitive Sotheby Special appeared later at Geneva. It was this car, in dark blue with gold pinstriping, that sent the British media into raptures. *Tomorrow's World* called it: ‘The most desirable object ever produced by the British motor industry.’ The *Evening Post* claimed the Ogle was: ‘So full of fascinating ideas that it is impossible to focus on one point for long.’

There was never any real talk of series manufacture. “It was far too expensive to make in volume,” recalls Tom Karen. “We really didn’t want to do any more.” But Mrs Agate had other ideas. Despite being an Aston Martin lover, and living close to its Newport Pagnell factory, she nonetheless wanted a car that she couldn’t “see testing every day”, so contacted Royal-appointed car supplier Murkitt Brothers Ltd of Huntingdon to badger Ogle into making

another one. Which, after a great deal of persuasion, it did, handing chassis 002 to its expectant owner in March 1973. Tragically, she didn’t live to enjoy the car much beyond that Silverstone adventure, dying shortly afterwards in an unrelated traffic accident.

Tom recalls this, the second car, being markedly better made than the original: “The first was a prototype – inevitably, it was built in a bit of a hurry. The cigarette people were supposed to have given it to Graham Hill for promotional purposes – WO Wills sponsored his nascent Grand Prix team – but I don’t think he drove the car much, probably because it was sprayed in the colours of the cigarette livery, which wasn’t pretty. The car was not treated well and, before long, became quite shabby. The second machine was built by just one man – I can’t remember his name – who was a perfectionist. He did a lovely job.”

Today, this most remarkable Aston is less of a car and more a ’70s time capsule. Resplendent in a searing shade of Post Office red (it was originally a more sober burgundy, with subtle pinstriping), and topped with that green and gold roof, there’s no subtlety here, yet you can’t

help but marvel at the boldness of it all. This is exactly what dream cars are meant to be like: bold, daring and ever so slightly barking.

At the time, Ogle’s PR puff talked of building a machine that was ‘Splendidly British, a sophisticated fast car with fresh, realistic ideas, good simple, elegant lines, excellent craftsmanship and lots of character.’ And it did just that. This wondrous device certainly has character. Beneath the extraneous clutter, the lines are handsome enough and it is certainly well made. As for the ‘realistic ideas’, at least a couple have one foot in reality – it’s just that nobody chose to perpetuate them.

The frontal treatment is pleasing, the Lucas halogens fixed behind pneumatically operated flip-down lids. “I’ve always had an aversion to pop-up lights,” says Tom. “They look ugly when in place, and if they stop working and won’t flip up, you’re in trouble. That is why I opted for fail-safe lids – even if the lids don’t go back up, you still have lights.” The bonnet bulge is a later addition: the car was converted from injection to carbs in the late ’70s. “I was very unhappy when I saw that,” adds Tom. “The original bonnet was smooth with just a NACA duct.”



Left-right: punctuated air vent is typical of the neat detailing; dazzling cockpit is let down by uncomfortable seats; flip-down headlight covers remain open if they fail

In profile, the car is well balanced, with Ogle's trademark dramatically upswept waistline caricatured beyond that of its earlier Reliant Scimitar GTE. It's only when you move to the rear that it goes all strange. *CAR* likened the severely punctured rump to 'a particularly succulent piece of Gruyère cheese'. And there can be no better description than that. Inside, it looks equally bizarre: the single rear seat is there on the logical grounds of why ferry two doubled-up shorties when you can house a six-footer outstretched in comfort? You simply cannot argue with a rationale like that. Once reclined on it, staring through the green-hued roof, maybe you can. It's comfortable – more so than in the front – but disconcerting.

It's this sense of starry-eyed futurism that makes the Ogle Aston so captivating. Less so when you discover the fairly fundamental driving aspects that were forgotten. For a car that made so much of its light-absorbing glazing, why was it deemed unnecessary to fit sunvisors to the only area that didn't receive this treatment: the windscreen? In direct sunlight, even with shades on, you cannot see out of it. And this while motionless.

In truth, this endearing throwback drives much like any other DBS V8: the same glorious bellow from the Tadek Marek all-alloy motor, meaty rack-and-pinion steering that, despite hydraulic power assistance, still leaves you feeling as if you have undergone a thorough physical, and undernourished anchors that require all six brake lights to be illuminated before two tonnes of Tupperware and steel are finally arrested. Unlike its sister car, 002 is an automatic, which makes it a hoot under kickdown as the tail squats and the nose rises. In the corners, it's a floaty old thing but faithful with it, even if the inhumane driver's throne is less than embracing when pressing on with any conviction.

Driving, however, isn't really what the Ogle Aston is all about. It's a dream car and, as such, like most of its ilk, what matters are the visuals. The fact that it drives at all only makes it all the more worthwhile. Most concept cars are just that: ideas that hint towards a futurescope, with no real thought being given to the present. This one, through the efforts of a persuasive pensioner and an unheralded artisan, grew from a dream car into a real car, so with that in mind you can forgive it the occasional foible. It really is quite marvellous – in a knowing, ironic sort of way, obviously.

This story was first published in Classic & Sports Car in January 2003. Tom Karen sadly passed away in December 2022, at the age of 96



From top: SX1000; Riley-based Ogle 1.5; a project for Daimler eventually morphed into the Reliant Scimitar GT; Triplex Princess estate; Avon Astra

OGLE THESE: SOME IT DID EARLIER

Despite its relatively low profile, Ogle remains one of Britain's leading design houses, responsible for a raft of award-winning creations from furniture to aeroplanes, crash-test dummies to truck cabs. The company was founded in 1954 by David Ogle, a talented industrial designer who made a name for himself styling radios and TV sets for Bush. But his passion lay with cars, his first offering being the Ogle 1.5. Trumpeted as 'a new conception of the business executive's personal car', this glassfibre-bodied, Riley-based coupé found only eight takers by 1962, thanks in part to the crippling £1574 price-tag.

The SX1000, arguably the best-known Mini-based specialist sports car, arrived in the same year, with 66 being produced. It was in one of these that Ogle lost his life following an accident in 1962 while returning from Brands Hatch circuit. Into the breach stepped naturalised Czech Tom Karen. He had intended staying for six months, just to keep the firm afloat, but remained at the helm 40 years on. His first task was to complete a batch of rakish Daimler SP250-based coupés for the Helena Rubinstein cosmetics group, the design being adopted by Reliant for what, after a mild restyle, became the Reliant Scimitar GT. This marked the beginning of a fruitful relationship that later spawned the Anadol, the niche-busting GTE sports estate, plus the Robin, Ant, Kitten, Fox and the outrageous but ultimately unsuccessful Bond Bug.

Throughout the '70s, Ogle continued to maintain a longstanding association with Triplex, designing concept cars to showcase its glazing technology, while also devising a sadly aborted Fiat X1/9 rival for Reliant and several proposals for Rolls-Royce. By the turn of the following decade, however, Ogle had pretty much vacated the automotive arena, aside from some best-forgotten bodykits for Avon and Wood & Pickett, and an advanced MPV concept car. It continued to perform behind-the-scenes consultancy work for some of Europe's major players.



Left-right: supplementary console gauges are angled towards driver; V8 converted to carbs hence unfortunate bulge; *chaise longue* makes Ogle Aston a two-plus-one



“Dad was determined to keep this one nice; it became a bit of an obsession”

How the dedication of a passionate enthusiast has turned an everyday saloon from Turin into a family treasure

WORDS **ALASTAIR CLEMENTS**
PHOTOGRAPHY **OLGUN KORDAL**

Simon Hucknall is a worried man. And with very good reason. The snowstorms that blighted the fortnight before our arrival have stopped, and the roads are largely dry, but the salt still lies across the Tarmac like little corrosion cluster-bombs, ready to catch out the unwary (or the un-undersealed). When you are driving a 1970s Fiat, this is an important consideration – particularly when it’s a 1970s Fiat whose Pippin Red coachwork has never felt the touch of a welding torch or a paint gun.

The Hucknalls have seen what those cursed crystals can do before, because this isn’t the family’s first Fiat 128. “My dad, Ted, bought one new for £850 from Kilby Bridge Motors in 1970, when I was five, just after the 128 had been awarded European Car of the Year,” recalls Simon. “He traded in a 1961 Riley One-Point-Five that he had also bought new – it must have been like getting into a spaceship after that.” Unfortunately, however, the Italian machine didn’t have quite the same longevity: “He absolutely loved the 128, but it rusted like hell. I remember Dad bodging it, but after seven years it was pretty bad, so he bought another.”



Close to five decades later it is still in the family, with just 4143 miles on the odometer: no wonder Simon is feeling protective. But why would anyone go to such lengths to preserve a 128? "Dad was an engineer and an enthusiastic driver, so first-class dynamics and technical innovation were prioritised over mere form," explains Simon. "He had a real dislike for period Fords and the like because they were overstyled – he saw them as archaic, and you can see now he was right. This is clearly a car of the '70s, but the design has aged far less than, say, a Cortina MkIII or an HB Viva."

In truth, it was a design of the late 1960s, launched to replace the ageing 1100 in March 1969 as a two- and four-door saloon and the tiny Panorama estate. And while its styling was conservative to say the least, the engineering of the little Fiat was anything but, with independent suspension all round

and a transverse engine with front-wheel drive, a Fiat first – although it had been trialled in sister brand Autobianchi's Primula. And that motor was a gem: a belt-driven overhead-cam 'four' designed by Aurelio Lampredi and, in 1290cc form, as in Hucknall's car, also used to power the mid-engined X1/9.

But far more than even the legendary Lampredi, the man responsible for the 128's brilliance was Fiat stalwart Dante Giacosa. Simon is a former magazine road tester who has recently formed his own public relations

consultancy, Classic PROse, and like his father he is a lifelong enthusiast with an appreciation for fine engineering. "This was Giacosa's parting shot," he explains. "He'd been at Fiat since 1926 and was involved in everything, and this was his final project. Giacosa wanted to maximise the passenger area; the idea was that 80% of the car had to be for passengers and luggage – hence the spare wheel being in the engine bay, which results in a massive boot. There wasn't anything particularly revolutionary about the design, but it brought together everything that was new at the time and put it all into one complete package."

"It was the first car to use this undersquare, overhead-cam engine, which revved for Italy. Road testers took it to 7000rpm – 'without any valve bounce', they wrote. I think Fiat missed a trick with the gearing, though: the indirect gears are quite long, but there is a relatively short fourth so it really sings along."



Clockwise from left: 12-year-old Simon on the day of delivery, 20 April 1977; Ted Hucknall with his new car; Sylvia with Simon and first 128 in 1970; Simon, ted and Ted



Today there are thought to be only four 128s left on British roads, the model's rarity now masking its period success: factor in coupés and more than three million were built over a 16-year run. Then there were the Nasr 128s in Egypt, the Seat 128s in Spain and the Zastavas in Yugoslavia, where the basic outline continued in production in Serbia until 2003.

With Hucknall Jnr also having owned a 128 Special – a facelifted Series 1 – more than their fair share of that production run ended up at the family's Leicestershire home. But it was SFP 863R, ordered on 9 April 1977 via Trinity Motors in Leicester (now a Subaru dealer), that endured. "The original Positano Yellow 128 Dad used for everything, it was our only car," says Simon, "but when he got this he wanted to have a car he could keep nice and use only for high days and holidays – such as our weekend trips to Silverstone for VSCC meetings."

SFP is a 'Nuova 128', the second-generation model launched May 1976 and featuring a new front grille, larger square headlights, plastic bumpers and a revised interior. This one is a punchier 1300 CL (Comfort Luxe) with a heady



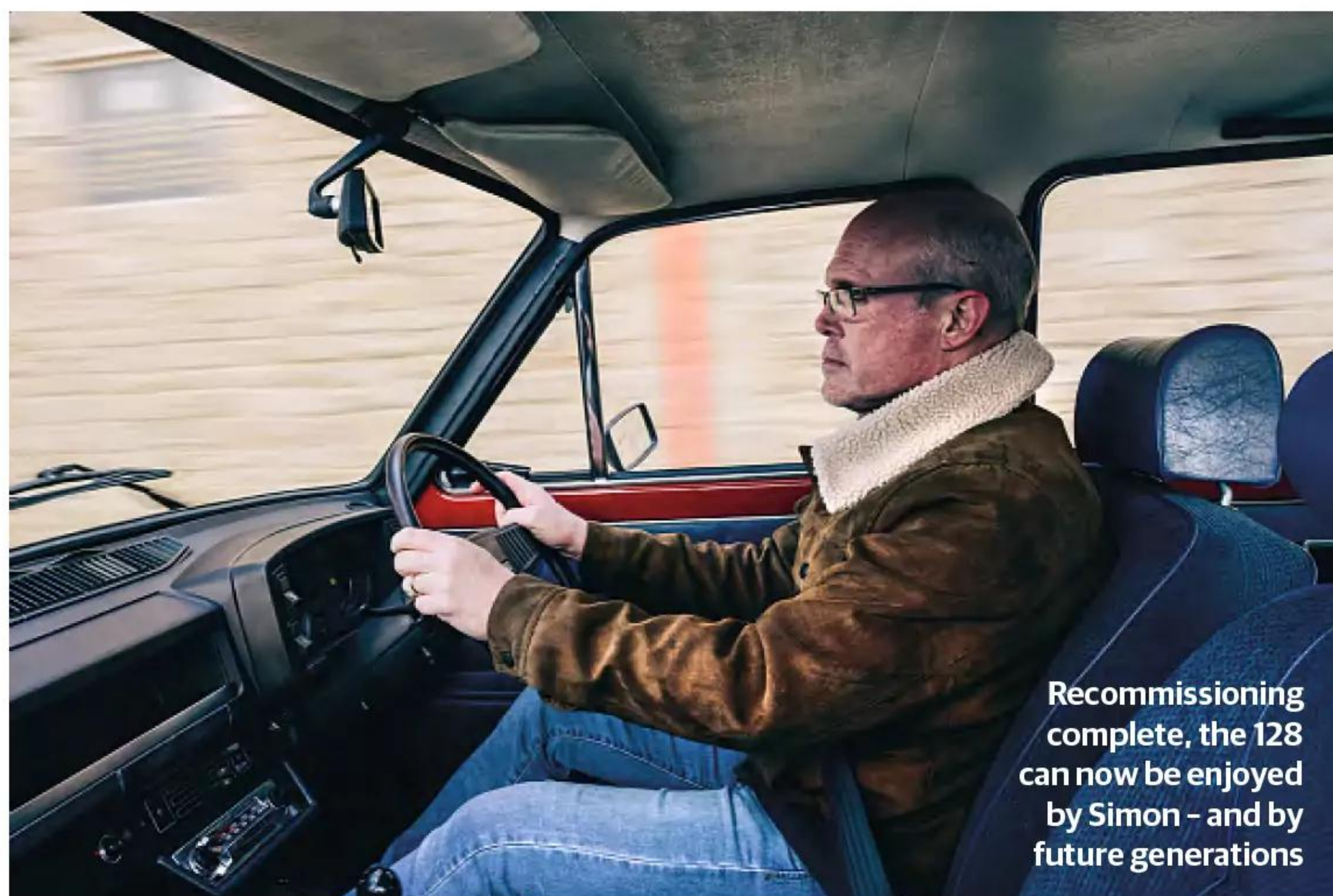
Compact overhead-cam 'four' is canted slightly forward to make room for the spare wheel under the bonnet, resulting in a generous rear boot

60bhp – although the 12-year-old Simon had his sights set rather higher than that, he now admits: "There was a 124 Sport Coupé 1800 in the showroom for £2400 and I was desperate for Dad to buy it, but he saved himself £400 and we ended up with this. I don't think he seriously considered any other cars at the time, although I do remember going out with him on a test drive in an Alfasud beforehand.

"The car was always garaged, and it was cleaned after every outing. He then began to buy runarounds for £2-300, Fiat 850s and Mini vans, to use every day and protect the 128. He was determined to keep this one nice; it became a bit of an obsession." Ted later bought a Fiat Amigo camper, which overtook the 128 for recreational use, so the little saloon was sidelined in the grandparents' garage, seeing daylight sparingly until the late 1980s before eventually falling silent.

Ted worked at Whittles on jet-engine testbeds, and it was this dangerous work that took him too soon, in 1999, from mesothelioma. "He would paint asbestos on to the engines to trap the heat, then they would get up to

"He began to buy cheap runarounds, such as Fiat 850s and Mini vans, to use every day so he could protect the 128"



Recommissioning complete, the 128 can now be enjoyed by Simon – and by future generations

FIAT 128 1300 CL

Sold/number built 1969-'85/2,776,000

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohc 1290cc 'four', single downdraught Weber carburettor

Max power 60bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 71.6lb ft @ 3200rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** struts, transverse leaf spring

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 12ft 8in (3856mm)

Width 5ft 2½in (1590mm)

Height 4ft 8in (1420mm)

Wheelbase 8ft ¼in (2448mm)

Weight 1814lb (823kg)

0-60mph 14.6 secs

Top speed 90mph **Mpg** 39.5

Price new £2208.50 (1977)

temperature and the asbestos would flake off and fly around,” says an understandably aggrieved Simon. “After Dad died I went to take a look at the car and the engine was seized solid. I took it over to a local garage and they stripped it and found that the pistons were rusted in, so it had to be rebored and fitted with new, oversized pistons. I got it MoT’d and it ran okay for a few weeks before it developed awful timing problems. The cambelt had clearly jumped, so it was put away again.”

Fast-forward to 2020, and mother Sylvia’s move into a care home prompted Simon to open the garage door once again. “I was tasked with selling the house and I was furloughed for three months, so it seemed the perfect time to address the problem,” he says. Initially Simon planned to do the work himself, but he soon called in the experts at Middle Barton Garage in Oxfordshire. “After 30 years it still looked pristine, but lurking beneath were all sorts of problems,” he explains. “The engine had seized again, the brakes were locked solid and fluid from the dampers had seeped out over the inside of the wheel rims. I managed to free the engine and the brakes, but getting her to fire up proved difficult.

“The guys at Middle Barton Garage were really brilliant. We replaced the bits that we had to but tried to leave the rest untouched. The emphasis was to keep it absolutely original.” A slipped timing belt had indeed stopped the car from running, but in the process the valves had been bent so replacements were fitted along with a new cam pulley, water pump and reconditioned alternator.

Although the car had been in a dry, warm garage that had protected the bodywork, aided by the plastic wheelarch liners fitted to these later 128s, there was still plenty of decay to tackle, Simon says: “A completely new exhaust system was needed, from manifold to tailpipe, after the old one spat out its innards when the engine was started for the first time. The corroded brake discs were replaced, along with front calipers, a regulator, rear brake cylinders, a full set of hoses and all of the suspension bushes.” The front MacPherson struts were also renewed, along with the rear dampers, all of which had started to leak fluid, and the steel wheel rims were refurbished and fitted with



From top: perfect door cards in remarkably clean cabin; ashtray still contains Ted’s cigar remnants; ball-topped gearlever offers a delightful shift

new Pirelli Cinturatos. “The original Michelin Xs weren’t available in the right size,” rues Simon, “and I still need to do something to dull down the wheels – they look a bit too shiny.”

After five months of recommissioning, the 128 returned from Middle Barton in November 2020. Tragically, however, Sylvia passed away at the age of 92 just a week before getting her long-promised ride in late husband Ted’s beloved Fiat. Quite apart from the excitement of seeing a vehicle completely as its maker intended, more than four decades on, there are poignant moments to be found throughout the

128, such as a note Simon took of mileages before and after one of their rare weekend trips. “Dad wasn’t a smoker, but he did have the occasional cigar,” he recalls. “I noticed the other day that there is still some cigar ash in the ashtray, so I haven’t cleaned it. When I first drove the car I shed a tear: it felt as fresh as it did in 1977 when I had my first outing in it. Dad preserved it for so long and never really drove it, yet he loved it so much.”

Even without the family connection, getting behind the wheel of such an untouched machine is always going to feel special. Still wearing its PDI stickers, the 128 features a wonderfully 1970s combination of brown dash and blue trim in its airy, spacious cabin. The soft, wide seats offer a Mini-like driving position behind the rather ugly two-spoke wheel, but fire up and the urgent exhaust rasp could only come from an Italian car.

On the move, the engine lives up to that early promise: smooth, free-revving and peppy, it quickly gets the 128 up to a comfortable 60mph cruise, aided by a four-speed gearbox with a long throw but a narrow gate and remarkably precise action. The steering, although heavy at low speeds, soon lightens and retains bags of feel, without the burden of the torquesteer that affects so many front-drive cars, and the wheel-at-each corner stance results in a chassis that loves to dive into corners. The whole package just feels so tight and solid – as it should do, because this is to all intents and purposes a new car, with that impression only challenged by the slightly musty aroma generated by decades spent tucked away in a garage.

Bombing along Leicestershire back-roads, it’s not difficult to imagine what a revelation the little Fiat must have been to the European Car of the Year jurors in 1969, with a modernity and a sportiness at odds with its prosaic, boxy styling. In his search for design rationality, Giacosa was Italy’s answer to Mini creator Alec Issigonis, and that makes it doubly disappointing that to the wider world his fun-size masterpiece has become little more than a footnote in Fiat history, while the BMC baby has gone on to achieve icon status. Luckily, however, thanks to the efforts of a father-and-son team, this particular unsung hero still hits all the right notes. 



Right: chocolate-brown dash was facelifted for Nuova 128 of '76. Above: all original books are in glovebox





Second-generation 128 got plastic bumpers, larger headlights and a new grille; bodywork has never been touched, but wheels were refurbished

"When I first drove the car I shed a tear. Dad preserved it for so long and never really drove it, yet he loved it so much"

The choice of a new



generation

Motoring's baby boom in the 1970s spawned the original superminis, but only some set a template that would endure

WORDS **SIMON CHARLESWORTH** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



In the 22 May 1982 issue of *Motor*, one reader put the argument for BMC's 1100/1300 range being the pioneering supermini. The magazine's staff replied: 'While the term "supermini" has never been exactly defined, it is generally accepted as describing a car designed to fill the gap between the still-unchallenged Mini and what could loosely be described as the "Escort" class. While there is room for argument, in our view the BMC 1100/1300 range – unlike the Metro – was designed to compete in the larger category and could not be true "superminis".'

This type of car is clearly easier to point out than to accurately define, but in the modern idiom – in addition to questions of market and physical size – a supermini is expected to feature a hatchback and front-wheel drive. Our featured trio isn't merely from the class's founding generation; they were built by three of Europe's automotive big-hitters and have each won a place on the European Car of The Year (ECoTY) podium, and they have been plucked from the start, middle or end of their production runs.

They represent the Continental riposte to Alec Issigonis' 10ft wonder; equally egalitarian, they are certainly bigger, more refined and arguably better developed than the Mini. The prize for the first of the breed, however, is a contentious one. Replacing the Fiat 850, the 127 was launched in April 1971 – but initially it made do with a conventional, saloon-type boot, whereas the Renault 5 that was unveiled in December 1971, and launched in early '72, came to the market ready, willing and able with front-wheel drive and a practical hatchback.

The 127 shared Fiat chief designer Dante Giacosa's layout with the larger 128: transverse engine installation with end-on gearbox, offset final drive and unequal-length driveshafts. It was a configuration he first trialled on the lower-volume Autobianchi Primula and which – unlike the Issigonis system – was already being used by rivals such as the Simca 1100.

The 1972 Renault 5, though, was not one of them. Instead, it borrowed from its older 1961 brothers, the Renaults 3 and 4 – successors to the 4CV that, in turn, had been inspired by the Citroën Traction Avant's installation with



Nippy performance, but the 5's soft ride means there is plenty of body roll in the corners



the gearbox ahead of the longitudinal engine. As on the 3 and 4, the new 5's rear transverse torsion bars were mounted behind one another, which resulted in a wheelbase longer on the offside than the nearside.

If the R5's engineering owed much to its 1960s predecessors, then its design certainly did not. Fiat broadly, if inadvertently, defined the underpinnings of the 1970s supermini, but the R5 would be the car to crystallise its shape. Penned by Michel Boué, the three-door, two-box hatch with sloping rear was the first car to feature integrated plastic bumpers – and it should have been the first to have full-height tail-lights (think Volvo 850 estate). Regrettably, the R5's good start in life was slightly marred by the appearance of the Audi 80, which beat the Renault to the 1973 ECoTY title.

Starting with the only car here in launch trim, Luke Herbert's stunning 1976 Polo L is thought to be the earliest-known Mk1 survivor in the UK. The Polo was introduced in Europe in 1975. It was, in essence, a rebadged and

lower-specification Audi 50. This NSU Prinz replacement had been styled by Claus Luthe and was polished by Bertone to become the new entry-level Volkswagen.

Like the R5's Spanish-built brother, the 1974 Renault 7, the Polo was joined by a booted sibling – the Derby – in 1977. Yet unlike the R5 and the 127 (via Seat), the Polo did not evolve to include a model with rear passenger doors, although it did undergo plastic surgery in 1979.

Next – and despite spending nine years languishing in a garden and thus confounding the cynics – is Gavin Bushby's unrestored 1978 Fiat 127 1050 CL. As an early Series II, which made its debut in 1977, the major changes include different front and rear lights, plus a straight rather than rising shoulderline. The Series II lasted until it was superseded by the mutton-dressed-as-lamb 1982-'83 Series III – a model blighted by the uninspiring plastic corporate nose as worn by the 1982 Strada. It was something of an anticlimax for this founding father and 1972 ECoTY winner.

Clockwise from above left: brown interior is period-perfect for high-spec TX; 1397cc 'four'; you're better off in the rev counter's green zone; funky six-spoke alloys; useful rear wash-wipe



The last of our threesome is a Renault 5 TX, a later model variant launched in 1982 with a generous specification list. The TX, along with the Alpine/Gordini Turbo, represented one last hurrah for Boué's R5. After a mild facelift for 1974, and a five-door model coming on stream in 1979, it was replaced by Marcello Gandini's 'Supercinç' in 1984.

It is tempting to be distracted by a well-practised diatribe about the contradiction of modern 'small cars' that are vast – but these models, just like the original Mini, certainly understand the term *minimus*. The question is, are they also sufficiently 'super', or is such a label mere hollow hyperbole?

Inside, only the Renault 5 TX subscribes to national stereotypes. The improved later dashboard is perfect 1970s *à la mode* and resembles a large, stale bar of chocolate brimming with a comprehensive range of chic instruments. Being a TX, this *bourgeois* R5 comes with a 1397cc engine (the largest here), a five-speed gearbox, power steering,

a radio-cassette, deep carpets, seats with side bolsters akin to giant sponge fingers, velour trim and six-spoke alloy wheels. Clearly some R5s are more *égal* than others.

As the miles pass, questions arise about the dynamic progress of modern cars. Like the Fiat, the Renault boasts an independent rear suspension set-up and features the rare combination of luxuriantly fluid ride quality, and light, swift and informative hydraulically assisted steering with ardent turn-in.

At urban speeds, the snake-hipped and glassy R5 is pretty much faultless – it totally ignores speed humps. On open roads, however, the chassis' double-act does translate into marked body roll through faster turns. At first it is somewhat startling because you expect to scuff a door mirror on a cat's eye, but somehow *La Régie* ignores physics and holds on.

Due to the engine location, the footwell is a little cramped and the pedal box is offset to the right; the five-speed gearbox is quite stiff and clunky – almost begrudging – to operate.



Clockwise from right: basic L spec means steel wheels; MW/LW radio; smallest engine here struggles on motorways; airy and ergonomic interior; clean design



It generates less lean than the Renault, but the Polo is still not a car that you can hustle through bends



Fiat is by far the best-handling of the three, attacking corners with great enthusiasm and encouraging a press-on style



As with the others here, only the lackadaisical brakes date its dynamics: they could be better, and the middle pedal feels like a blustery local councillor – there is plenty of movement and it appears to be doing something, but ultimately it's largely ineffectual.

Then there's the engine – a big fish in a small pond – which initially feels responsive, with a good flex of accelerative muscle at 3000rpm, but its work ethic doesn't last. Between 4000 and 4500rpm, its grumpy, tappety vocals start to boom and it becomes breathless – to the point where the protestations are such that only a mechanical megalomaniac would consider venturing near the redline at 8000rpm. Instead, it's best to keep the revs down, make use of the torque and enjoy the trendy TX's laid-back nature.

I'm someone who mentally files away old Volkswagens with items such as bricks, cabbages and dusters – things that cultivate neutral acceptance – so Luke's Polo L comes as a pleasant surprise. Its pretty, delicate and

attractive lines combine to form possibly the best-looking car here. Inside and out, this eerily original square-roof model, with four-hole front panel, balances functionalism and style – unless you're an oddity who doesn't appreciate its *Jason King* crushed-velour seats.

The Polo's airy cabin, tobacco-coloured trim and mock wood show that one of VW's primary aims was making this interior a nice place to be. Everything is where it should be, with the exception of the seatbelt buckle: the belt is instead trapped under a latch that operates like a parking barrier. Beyond the two-spoke steering wheel is a clear 100mph VDO speedo with the in-gear maxima demarcated.

Presented with a stylish dashboard – Luthe had proposed something similar for the NSU Ro80 – aquarium levels of visibility and manual steering that is lighter than even the R5's powered system, the Polo plays its ace: ease of use. Yet as the speed builds, this lightness translates into straight-ahead vagueness and a lack of consistency across the rack.

Clockwise from above left: cabin is mix of bland and colourful; flexible 'four' is a delight; door-mounted 'man bag' is a Continental touch; simple steels; eager chassis



The four-speed gearbox, though, is the nicest here – the throw may be long, but it's light and fluid across the gate, and engages positively. At anything above 60mph, the Polo's 895cc engine feels brutalised and the low gearing makes it sound strained, and it loses the sweet-natured temperament it has lower down the rev range. As Luke says: "It goes reasonably well for 40bhp, but on motorways it screams."

The Polo will do cornering, but that's just part of its job description. It's neutral enough at A-road speeds, yet after the Renault it does come across as being disinterested. Loading up the lateral g is not its forté and, while its roll is better tamed than in the R5, it tends to magnify the lack of steering detail. Stable, predictable, secure and approachable, with just a tinge of understeer to keep you in check – the Polo is a wheeled manifestation of sense and sagacity.

If logic lies at the heart of the Volkswagen experience, then on a flowing, twisty road the Fiat 127 feels like a little devil perched on your shoulder, whispering sufficiently wicked goading to make your driving licence sweat. Or the encouragement could just be coming from serial 127 enthusiast Gavin: "My first one – which was my first car, in fact – went off the end of the clock with five-up and a bootful of cricket kit. And it was still accelerating!"

Two-up, this 1050 CL will merrily zing past the national limit – this SII clearly not giving a damn that its gearbox lacks a fifth ratio, such is the gleeful nature of its flexible 1049cc overhead-cam 'four'. If only the rather sombre dash housed a rev-counter to accompany its 100mph speedo and quench my curiosity.

Aside from having a man-bag attached to the driver's door – cosmic! – golden interior trim and multi-coloured steering-column stalks, the 127's interior isn't particularly remarkable. There is less room than in the Polo, and the small pedals are close together and offset to the left, while the long gearstick looks as if it has come from a BTCC racer's sequential 'box.

The ride is the firmest of the three, and while

I'm being critical, my left hand had several disagreements with a ponderous gearchange that has a rubbery engagement. It becomes more familiar with mileage, but even then it can – and will – occasionally catch you out.

Moaning over. The 127 really is Fiat at the top of its game. The manual steering may require marginally the most effort, but it is still light and swiftly geared, and it easily transmits the most detailed information to the driver. Having such an eager ally at your command incites you into hurling it through corners – revelling in the 127's neutral balance, well-damped ride, controlled roll and ample grip.

Hunting for curly-wurly Tarmac becomes a mission – the peppy Adriatic Blue Fiat fizzles and growls through sober modern traffic in the manner of a mischievous toddler getting under the feet of a bench of dusty old judges.

So which is the best all-rounder? The Polo L is the only vehicle here to successfully predict the future of the supermini: a front-drive hatchback with a transverse Giacosa drivetrain, MacPherson struts at the front and a torsion beam at the rear. It is also the sole survivor of our trio – its great-great-grandkids continue to champion ease of use and a very middle-class take on style and 'classlessness', with controls that, while obeying the letter of dynamic principles, sadly sidestep their spirit.

The Renault 5 TX, meanwhile, features all of the tools that are necessary to cope with – and even enjoy – today's congested and holier-than-virtuous roads. Even now, it makes for a very tempting proposition as a daily driver.

Yet, for me, there is only one unforgettable supermini here: the characterful Fiat 127 1050 CL. It's the smallest of the three, but such is its superb connection and responsiveness, it even makes driving a Mini feel a little, well, unfinished in comparison. 

Thanks to Gavin Bushby; Luke Herbert; Mike Gale and Lisa Haworth-Langford at Renault UK; Anna Angelini at Fiat UK; Neil Birkitt and Rich Gooding

RENAULT 5 TX

Sold/no built 1972-'84/5,325,890 (all)

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohv

1397cc 'four', Weber carburettor

Max power 63bhp @ 5250rpm

Max torque 76lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission five-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by

wishbones, torsion bars, anti-roll bar

rear trailing arms, transverse torsion

bars; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 11ft 5in (3480mm)

Width 5ft 1in (1549mm)

Height 4ft 7½in (1410mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 10in (2388mm) nearside,

7ft 11in (2413mm) offside

Weight 1830lb (830kg)

0-60mph 12.2 secs

Top speed 95mph **Mpg** 37-47

Price new £4530

VOLKSWAGEN POLO L

Sold/number built 1975-'81/768,200

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc

895cc 'four', Solex carburettor

Max power 40bhp @ 5900rpm

Max torque 45lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by

MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear**

torsion beam axle, trailing arms, coil

springs, telescopic dampers

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear

Length 11ft 6in (3505mm)

Width 5ft 2in (1580mm)

Height 4ft 5in (1350mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 8in (2330mm)

Weight 1568lb (712kg)

0-60mph 18 secs

Top speed 80mph **Mpg** 38-45

Price new £1798

FIAT 127 CL

Sold/number built 1971-'83/c3.8million

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc

1049cc 'four', Weber carburettor

Max power 50bhp @ 5600rpm

Max torque 57lb ft @ 3000rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by

MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear**

lower wishbones, transverse leaf spring,

telescopic dampers

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear

Length 11ft 9½in (3594mm)

Width 5ft (1524mm)

Height 4ft 6in (1372mm)

Wheelbase 7ft 3½in (2223mm)

Weight 1554lb (705kg)

0-60mph 15 secs

Top speed 88mph **Mpg** 33-45

Price new £2471





FREAK *or* FUN

Movie star, style icon, automotive joke: call it what you like, the AMC Pacer is anything but forgettable – but was it really that bad?

WORDS **MARTIN BUCKLEY** PHOTOGRAPHY **JAMES MANN**



noque?



Pacer's driver appeal is limited, but it's smooth

In America, the uncertainties of the mid-'70s in terms of emissions laws, rising fuel prices and safety legislation drove a number of small cars to the market in almost unseemly haste. The country was feeling bad about itself in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate, and there was a sense among a fairly significant section of the car-purchasing public that if they were offered a credible, US-built 'compact', they would buy it.

It was a depressing time for anyone who professed to have an interest in cars. All around, V8s were being emasculated – you could even buy a four-cylinder Mustang. There was a 55mph speed limit and the once classic 'full-size' barge was cut down to size as Americans began to appreciate that bigger was no longer necessarily better.

Even Cadillac was building its first mid-sized product – the Seville – as the imported-car market began to take on greater significance. Despite being saddled with ugly running lights and massive impact bumpers, the sophisticated ways of the European automobile were beginning to educate more American buyers, while huge numbers of others learned to love the thrift and reliability of Japanese cars.

The Volkswagen Beetle had gained social acceptability for small cars in America – although you might still have been branded a 'Commie' for driving one in certain, less enlightened states. Post-Fuel Crisis, frugal compact machines from the Far East were taking on an increasing significance, bringing to mind news footage of an angry American

automobile factory worker symbolically setting fire to a Toyota – and, for me, a dimly remembered scene from *McMillan & Wife* in which Rock Hudson folded himself into a Honda Civic. The world was changing.

Detroit's reaction to this fresh mood of austerity was typically uninspired. Ford produced the miserable Pinto with its exploding fuel tank, and General Motors created the utterly undistinguished Chevrolet Nova. Chrysler couldn't even be bothered to design something for itself, preferring to import Hillman Avengers from its English outpost and rebadge them as Plymouth Crickets. Even Leyland took advantage of the atmosphere of belt-tightening to dump a few Austin Marinas on unsuspecting Americans – remember Ed Asner driving one in *Lou Grant*?

In that context, the much-derided AMC Pacer appears relatively appealing. At least it *looked* different (even if it wasn't underneath), and at a distance of decades its shortcomings are comedic rather than cynical or sinister (see above, ref exploding fuel tanks).

Why was it so awful? It is hard to know where to begin, but the Pacer's problems really stemmed from the fact that it was the issue of American Motors Corporation (AMC) – by far the weakest of the large American producers and independent of the 'Big Three'.

Funds to develop truly new models were limited in the early '70s, yet it was felt that AMC, with its reputation for producing America's most pedestrian range of cars, needed to try something radically different to make its voice heard in the marketplace. It had already proved

AMERICAN MOTORS PACER

Sold/number built 1975-'80/c280,000

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-iron, ohv 4299cc straight-six, single Carter carburettor with emissions control

Max power 110bhp @ 3500rpm

Max torque 195lb ft @ 2000rpm

Transmission three-speed 'Torque Command' Chrysler automatic, RWD

Suspension: front independent, by double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar **rear** live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs; telescopic dampers f/r

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 14ft 4in (4369mm)

Width 6ft ¼in (1836mm)

Height 4ft 9½in (1461mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 5in (2565mm)

Weight 3684lb (1671kg)

0-60mph 17 secs

Top speed 93mph **Mpg** 16

Price new £5413 (1976)

itself creative with limited raw materials by producing the 1970 Gremlin, which was really a Hornet chopped off behind the rear wheels and hailed as America's first 'sub-compact'. Being American, it was also the only sub-compact offered with an optional V8.

Development of the Pacer started in 1971. AMC got around the problem of development costs by simply adapting its Matador coupe's drivetrain and running gear, chopping the wheelbase by 18in and reducing overall length by 30in, but retaining the width of the full-sized car. In its advertising blurb AMC called the Pacer 'the first wide small car': it was 172in long but 72¼in wide – broader than a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow and about the same length as a Ford Granada. Apart from its power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering – it was one of the first American cars to feature it – and disc front brakes, the Pacer was meticulously conventional in its underpinnings, right down to the leaf springs and live rear axle.

The notion of front-wheel drive had not inspired potential buyers, but a Wankel rotary engine was slated for use until quite close to the Pacer's launch. It was to have been bought in from General Motors until AMC could build its own, but the Fuel Crisis put an end to the idea. Chastened by NSU's Wankel experience, GM couldn't tame the thirst or emission problems of the rotary engine and decided to abandon development, leaving AMC with no option other than to go with its existing straight-six.

The Pacer might have had more credibility as a home-grown answer to the invading hordes

had it not been powered by this 3.8-litre lump, which could barely push its quivering bulk to 90mph on an emissions-strangled 95bhp, while averaging a measly 18mpg or less. Its only nod towards modernity was electronic ignition.

Taken from the Jeep, the power unit was so heavy that it broke the steering on early Pacers. In fact, the car was so sturdily built (in anticipation of severe Federal crash safety legislation that never came into force) that AMC abandoned all pretensions of economy and offered the car with a bigger, 4.2-litre 'six' from 1976 and a 5-litre V8 from '78, although these are rare. Trim levels embraced 'D/L' (basic), 'X' (vinyl bucket seats, floor-mounted auto shifter, sports steering wheel) and luxurious 'Limited' (power windows and door locks, tilting steering wheel).

AMC's styling supremo, Dick Teague – who, tellingly, had a problem with one of his eyes after a childhood car crash and was unable to perceive depth – ignored the contemporary fashion for angular bodywork and instead fashioned a rounded, futuristic two-door hatchback with a touch of the lunar vehicle

about it. Massively deep, panoramic windows contributed to the car's impressive weight – it was heavier than a W123 Mercedes-Benz – and made the optional air conditioning work hard. Nearly 40% of the body's surface area was glass. Bug-eyed as it was, the Pacer was an extraordinarily slippery design, with a drag coefficient of 0.32, and it predicted the move towards eliminating rain gutters with doors that blended into the roof.

The appallingly packaged new AMC was a hatchback with limited luggage space and very ordinary rear-seat room. The one fact that fascinates everyone about the car is that the passenger door was 100mm longer than the driver's – not only to make it easier to get your shopping into the back, but also to encourage passengers to enter the car from the safer side. That was all fine until AMC tried to sell the cars in the UK with right-hand drive: the driver's door was so big that getting out in a typically confined English parking space was virtually impossible.

The British press was a lot less forgiving of the Pacer's weaknesses than the Americans when the car was offered in the UK – with a plank-like teak dashboard conversion – in 1976. The weekly *Motor* announced on its cover 'We test the Pacer (and wish we hadn't)' and concluded simply: 'Slow, thirsty, expensive.' At £5413, right-hand-drive Pacers were in contention with Jaguars and upmarket Opels, but in reality the only point of comparison was the fuel consumption. Shortly afterwards, AMC stopped importing cars into the UK altogether.

'Styling supremo Dick Teague – who, tellingly, had an eye problem – fashioned a futuristic two-door hatchback'



Left-right: badge lacked cachet; no-frills doorhandle; AMC hoped the Pacer would make its name; burgundy trim inside; emasculated 'six'



Left, from top: racer sponsored by Levi's – the road cars were offered with denim trim; faux wood for station wagon



"Right, full rudder"
- hard cornering
demands plenty
of wheel-twirling



Period plastics, colours and velour trim aside, the Pacer cabin includes some neat detailing; British Wolfrace alloys only add to the AMC's ironic statement

Roger Bell was editor of *Motor* at the time. "I remember it for all the wrong reasons," he says. "I came up with the coverline... In those days that was pretty damning. I just remember it as a lump: badly finished, badly made, horrendous to drive, with steering that needed twirling and twirling to go around corners... I was left with an overall impression of great ineptitude. It looked like a goldfish bowl – quite eye-catching for all the wrong reasons – and I seem to remember you fell out of the seat every time you showed it a corner. Not long after, I went to the Daytona 24 Hours and one of the supporting races was for AMC Pacers. They were quite swift on the track – they had obviously had things done to them for racing that should have been done for the road. It was a one-make series, I suspect started by AMC to get rid of all the stockpiled cars."

Driving Don Imber's car today, you can afford to be a little more forgiving of the poor old Pacer. This 1977 American-market car was resurrected by Don after spending years languishing in the front garden of a house in St Albans – having probably been brought over by a US serviceman. "It's my everyday drive,"

says Don, who also has a 1962 Thunderbird and a pre-WW2 Triumph Dolomite. "I like the attention it receives – I get smiles and thumbs-up from people all the time."

The wine-coloured velour trim and matching moulded dashboard are pure cheese, the limited instrumentation boiled down to simply a speedometer and fuel gauge. Slim Jims can slide on to the rear bench without folding the front seat forward, so that big door does have its uses. Under way it feels smooth, with a light rustle from the engine that is interchangeable with English straight-sixes of the period from Ford and Vauxhall. You could order a three-speed manual with Laycock overdrive, but the 'Torque Command' three-speed auto originates from Chrysler and behaves perfectly well. Otherwise it just lollops quietly, with the ride its most outstanding feature: soft, but not as soggy as most contemporary American cars. The steering is light and disconnected – it's hard to recognise the supposed benefits of rack and pinion here – and the car becomes wallowy when cornered hard. But it's not that bad.

On home ground, the Pacer's 'lemon' image is somewhat belied by the fact that sales in its

first year were huge, at 145,528 units, with the domestic press saying polite things about the new car through gritted teeth in the name of patriotism. Initial enthusiasm for the model flagged significantly in 1977, despite attempts to shore up sales with a bizarre station wagon version (with fake wood along its flanks) and a Mercedes-Benz-style front grille. Production ended in 1980, although the final year's cars – just 1746 of them – were built up from leftover 1979 parts. In total, some 280,000 Pacers were produced in a six-season run.

We might lazily brand Americans as lacking in irony, but the increasing fanbase of the Pacer proves otherwise. Its profile was raised by film appearances as the archetypal geek/loser's car: *Wayne's World* was its finest hour, but the Pacer pops up in other places, too, from David Byrne's *True Stories* to Eminem music videos. While the Vega, Pinto and others of that miserable ilk have faded from the memory, the Pacer lives on in the collective consciousness as America's answer to the Austin Allegro, as convenient and cuddly a symbol of everything that was wrong about the US motor industry in the '70s as the Edsel is for the '50s. 



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Who says racy tin-tops were an '80s thing?

The hot-hatch revolution was in fact an evolution of an existing theme, and these small sports saloons from Morris and Simca mark the origin of the species

WORDS **ANDREW ROBERTS** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**







Clockwise: ADO16 was given a '70s makeover to become the GT; transverse A-series breathes through twin SU's; matt-black fascia with sports steering wheel; alloy-like hubcaps; well-stocked dash; tipping front seats



Clipped fins and vertical lights give the 1300GT an older look than the Simca, but it's undeniably pretty



When on location for a photoshoot, one of the most intriguing aspects of the day is often the reaction of passers-by towards the vehicles being captured by our snappers. Sometimes you might overhear *sotto voce* remarks along the lines of “Jolly crikey! What the blazing Hades is that?” (Or words to that effect.) This ’71 Morris 1300GT, however, commonly elicits a response of instantaneous recognition. It appears that so many people at the University of Reading have either owned one as a first or second car, or been taken to school in one. By way of contrast, the Simca 1204 Special attracts plenty of admiring looks but no strong reminiscences of times past.

Yet both are very similar: front-wheel-drive sports saloons that were aimed at ‘professional class’ motorists who had outgrown their Mini Coopers. Family responsibilities and expense-account lunches meant they craved rather more space than a Mini 1275GT could offer. The Triumph 1500 was a very comfortable front-wheel-drive saloon, but its image was one of middle-aged respectability. Nor was such a clientele overly keen on joining the rear-drive world of the Avenger, Escort or Viva. The 1300GT and the 1204 Special would have both appeared to be the perfect solution, and they were even advertised, in the UK at least, along similar lines. ‘Family men; stop yearning for a sports car’, urged the Simca posters, while the BLMC 1300GT was apparently aimed at young parents suffering from the ‘motoring equivalent of the seven-year itch’. Ah, the halcyon days of 1970s sales copy.

Of our duo of fine test cars, it is the Morris that comes the closest to the stereotype of the 1970s GT saloon, and its debut in late 1969 was rather well-timed. As most readers will already be aware, the BMC/BLMC 1100/1300 range was one of a complexity on a par with an episode of *The Prisoner*, and it would take a separate article to explain its intricacies. All that needs to be

noted here is that from October 1968 onwards, the MG and Riley 1300s were powered by a 70bhp twin-carb 1275cc A-series engine. The latter version was discontinued the following year, together with all other cars bearing the Blue Diamond, and the Austin/Morris 1300GT represented both its successor and a new form of sporting ADO16. Gone was the older model’s leather trim, walnut veneered dash and general associations with Brylcreem, blazers and Leslie Phillips accents. The ‘GT that just had to be’ ushered in a new decade, when hitherto staid chartered accountants donned their first pair of flared slacks and unwisely experimented with Mungo Jerry sideburns.

The BLMC 1300GT was following a new trend for reasonably priced sports saloons that was arguably started by the 1968 HB Series Vauxhall Viva GT, with its less-than-subtle exterior decoration combined with plenty of ‘Gran Turismo’ badges. In contrast, the first Escorts

‘The engine note is on the cusp of exuberant, but the GT will cruise at 70mph’

to bear the GT insignia, as with the Cortina Mk1 and Mk2, were fairly low-key in appearance, giving the ADO16 a further chance to shine in the marketplace. There was a vinyl roof, a matt-black grille and dashboard, a rear anti-roll bar and slightly lowered suspension, plus sports wheels and – naturally – go-faster stripes.

The 1300GT was initially marketed as both a Morris and an Austin, with the former ceasing to be available in the UK from 1971 – making ‘our’ car one of the last to be so badged. It should be said that possibly only British Leyland could have replaced one model with two new ones in the name of rationalisation. The two-door MG 1300 also remained in production, just in case the GT’s looks proved too much for conservative drivers.

Back in the early 1970s, some cynics were prone to muttering that GT stood for ‘getting tacky’, but the fact remains that the Morris was a very attractive package. For less than £1000, the proud new owner gained a rev counter, a reversing light, reclining front seats and two-speed wipers – plus, of course, the dynamic abilities that justly made the ADO16 world famous. The steering is extremely responsive and the Morris’ cornering abilities are the equal of – if not superior to – many a small car of the 1970s and even the early ’80s. Under acceleration the understeer is always predictable, and to derive the best from the GT gearchanges should be made in an unhurried fashion. The engine note may be on the cusp of exuberant, but the 1300GT will cruise amiably at 65-70mph. The anti-roll bar means that the sportier Morris is less prone to pitching than a 1962-vintage 1100, although the suspension is still perhaps best suited to A-roads.

Inside, the adjustable backrests do go some way to compensating for that familiar ‘bus driver’ pose, and the dashboard irresistibly reminds me of those days when nearly all would-be Jackie Stewarts would don a pair of mock-leather driving gloves for a trip to the newsagent. The overall cabin space is quite remarkable for a car that is barely more than 12ft in length, while the compact dimensions make the 1300GT extremely adroit urban transport and serve as an illustration of just how bloated modern ‘small’ cars are. The contrast between the Morris and the recent MINI Countryman is quite startling.

As for those external decorations, they certainly have period charm – the phrase that kept running through my head was ‘Terry Scott goes mod’ – and they only add to the enjoyment of what is a very agreeable vehicle. When the GT was launched, the 1100/1300 had already been in production for seven years, but even when the ADO16 was replaced by the Allegro in 1973, the high-performance version was still able to compete with the latest generation of European light saloons.

A further appeal of the Morris is that to nearly anyone of my era (who was born in the year of the Austin Maxi) it has the power to evoke memories of a time when the A-series transmission whine was an essential part of each day’s soundtrack. ADO16s that were variously finished in cheery Flame Red or the especially bright shade of Bronze Yellow could be seen bringing glamour to Above Bar Street, or the car park of the Bitterne branch of Sainsbury’s – all of them making Farina Oxford taxis look positively staid. No doubt my own Southampton-based experiences were replicated across the United Kingdom, while across the Channel a 1204 can doubtless provoke similar emotions. After all, this was the flagship model of what would become Simca’s best-selling range of all time.

By 1962, the Simca management team was paying close attention to the front-wheel-drive products of Citroën, not to mention the recently launched Renault 4, and they decided to produce the marque’s first front-drive model – one that would also bridge the gap between the rear-engined 1000 and the conventional, rear-wheel-drive 1300 saloon. It was decided that Project 928 would have a transverse layout, à la ADO16, with the motor inclined by 30° to



MORRIS 1300GT

Sold/number built 1969-'71/19,304

Construction steel moncocque

Engine all-iron, ohv 1275cc 'four', twin SU carburettors

Max power 70bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 74lb ft @ 3250rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by wishbones, anti-roll bar **rear** trailing arms; interconnected Hydrolastic displacers f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 12ft ½in (3703mm)

Width 5ft ½in (1534mm)

Height 4ft 5½in (1359mm)

Weight 1885lb (855kg)

0-60mph 14.5 secs

Top speed 96mph **Mpg** 28

Price new £909 (1969)

SIMCA 1204 SPECIAL

Sold/number built 1967-'81/2.2m (inc 1100)

Construction steel moncocque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, ohv 1204cc 'four', twin Weber carburettors

Max power 75bhp @ 6000rpm

Max torque 76lb ft @ 4500rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by wishbones **rear** trailing arms; torsion bars, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs front, drums rear, with servo

Length 13ft (3962mm)

Width 5ft 2in (1575mm)

Height 4ft 8in (1422mm)

Weight 1911lb (867kg)

0-60mph 14.6 secs

Top speed 100mph **Mpg** 30

Price new £1038 (1971)

allow a comparatively low bonnet line. The future Simca 1100 also had to gain the approval of Chrysler – which in 1963 had become a majority shareholder in the French car maker – because by any standards it marked a radical step in the firm's history.

The 1100 made its debut at the 1967 Paris Salon, where it caused no small sensation. Compared with other Gallic front-wheel-drive offerings of the late 1960s, the Simca was faster and more luxurious than the Renault 4, more compact and cheaper than the Renault 16, and had a more youthful image than the Peugeot 204. In June 1970, Simca introduced the first sports version of the 1100 in the form of the 1204 Special, which used the engine from the 1200S Coupé. The driver who bought the car that satisfied his or her 'need for power' gained a pair of twin-choke Weber carbs, a three-spoke steering wheel, servo-assisted brakes, extra instruments, head restraints and long-distance driving lights set into the grille.

That first version of the Special was replaced by a 1294cc model for 1972, by which time the 1100 had become the best-selling car in France. By 1973 Simca had produced one million of them, and its pioneering five-door design went on to inspire a future generation of hatchbacks. The 1978 launch of the Horizon marked, in effect, the arrival of the 1100's successor. Three years later production ceased in France, with the final saloons built in Spain in 1982.

Peugeot had acquired Chrysler's European operations in 1978, rapidly applying the Talbot badge to Simca products, and by 1980 the famous brand was phased out entirely. The 1204 was shortlived – indeed the featured car is the sole-surviving example on our shores known to the Simca Club UK – but the 1100 was not an uncommon sight on British roads in period. Today the swallow badge is almost forgotten here, and Britons are more likely to encounter the Simca making a cameo in Fred Zinnemann's *The Day of the Jackal* (even if the narrative is set in 1963) than in real life.

That is a great pity, because the 1204 is an exceptionally beguiling vehicle. Its appeal seems to be slightly more refined than that of the Morris, the coachwork looks more formal and the metallic turquoise paint finish helps to

give it a less aggressive appearance. The Special boasted a 'simulated wooden steering wheel' and some quite racy hubcaps, but the first impression is of a car that exudes Gallic self-assurance as opposed to suburban boy racer.

The Simca's cabin is dominated by a fascia that is a masterpiece of non-ergonomics, but there is a commanding driving position and comfortable front seats with head restraints as standard. The 1204 was more expensive in the UK than the 1300GT, but the specification did include a clock and a cigar lighter, while there is also the bonus of the lifting tailgate. In 1966, the ADO16 was available as a three-door Countryman/Traveller estate, and in the same year BMC experimented with a five-door hatchback (codenamed YDO9 and eventually produced in Australia as the Morris Nomad, although it was never offered in the UK). In spite of that, the GT never featured such a useful utilitarian touch – it was yet another lost opportunity for BMC.

On the road, it soon becomes evident that the 1204's suspension was designed to cope with not only the *Autoroute du Nord*, but also the often very poor roads of rural France and Spain – not to mention Simca's key export markets in Francophone Africa. Anyone who has experienced travel by ADO16 along a badly

'By any standards, the Simca was a radical step in the marque's history'

surfaced country lane will recall how the Hydrolastic set-up would cause the occupants to pitch up and down, but the torsion bars of the Special take nearly all potholes in their stride. The Simca does not quite have the 'go-kart writ large' appeal of the Morris, but it presents an excellent compromise between press-on motoring and more sedate journeys due to its combination of well-planned weight distribution, decent brakes and steering that is eminently suited to being driven with verve. It is also the ideal vehicle with which to counter the arguments of any Volkswagen Golf GTI owner about what precisely constitutes the first European hot hatch.

This was inevitably going to be a difficult choice, because both the Morris and the Simca have such unaffected charm. The 1300GT bathes any British motorist of a certain vintage in unabashed nostalgia – think Cadbury's Amazin' Raisin bars, *The Brothers* on BBC1 and Chicory Tip singing *Son of My Father*. It is also a veritable scaled-up Mini Cooper with four doors. The Simca, meanwhile, gives you the urge to don a pair of shades and a Serge Gainsbourg facial expression (although I might give his Gitanes a miss). In an ideal world, I would have the Morris as a town car for weekdays and the 1204 Special for relaxed weekends with *L'Anamour* blaring from the 8-Track cartridge player.

Thanks to Des Cooke, Mark Parratt, The 1100 Club (the1100club.com); Simca Club UK including The Talbot Register (simcatalbotclub.org); University of Reading (reading.ac.uk)



Clockwise: Simca looks taller, but there's only a couple of inches in it; oblong speedo; neat hubcaps; cabin has a US ambience; 75bhp 1204cc 'four' is fed by a brace of Webers; Minimalist badging on the fascia





Origami

William Towns' angular update of Alec Issigonis' Mini was a glimpse into the future of city-car design

WORDS **PAUL WALTON** PHOTOGRAPHY **MICHAEL BAILIE**



Everyone can claim to have distant yet interesting relatives. Take yours truly: it's said that I'm related – by marriage – to Sir Isaac Newton. Then there's the humble Mini. One of its more unusual family members is an amazing, futuristic interpretation of the little car that's as far away from the original as the great polymath was from being a motoring journalist in his mid-30s. Although the Minissima wore British Leyland badges – and was exhibited by the company as a future Mini – this slice of pure 1970s sci-fi optimism was the work not of BL but the king of wedge design himself, William Towns.

Following his stint at Aston Martin, where he had styled the DBS, Towns went freelance and, in 1973, turned his attention to creating a new small car. “He wanted to design something completely different from the Mini,” explains Lizzie Cariss, wife of the late Towns. “He wanted to make a really tiny but proper city car that was easy to use.”

It was around that time that Towns' interest in the razor-edged styling with which he would become synonymous began. As a result, his new baby was very sharp and very angular, and a world away from the original Mini's curves. But it was more than just about style: it was also a clever piece of interior packaging. Despite being 2300mm long (7ft 6½in) – some 750mm (2ft 5½) shorter than the already diminutive Mini – it offered plenty of room for four passengers. Towns achieved this spaciousness by making his car as tall as it was long, with a short bonnet and steeply raked windscreen resulting in huge internal dimensions for a car of its wheelbase. His idea became one of the first ‘monobox’ designs, a full decade ahead of the Matra-designed Renault Espace.

He did cheat a little, too. While the front two seats faced forwards, the rear pair faced into the centre of the car. And although Towns

made provision for plenty of cubbyholes dotted around the cabin, there was no room for a boot.

The most innovative feature was the single, side-hinged door placed at the back of the car. Towns' reasoning behind this was safety, the idea being that the driver would reverse the car up to the kerb so that passengers could step out and avoid oncoming traffic. “I began the project to make it easier for my wife and family,” he said at the time. “Parking and manoeuvring near to the shops is getting more and more difficult. This car can be parked end-on if needs be. My wife could safely let the children out through the back door – it's the only door – straight on to the pavement. The doorhandle is under her control, so they are quite safe in the back.”

Several decades on, Lizzie can't remember who turned her husband's design into a reality, but she thinks it was one of his former Aston Martin colleagues who built the body. The first example was constructed from aluminium, but Towns had a more modern material in mind should the car ever reach production.

“I built the prototype using aluminium panels because this is an easy medium to work in for one-off vehicles,” Towns explained to *The Design Journal* in 1974. “But I would envisage volume production taking far more advantage of plastics. I would favour the use of structural polyurethane foam panels, which are self-skinned and combine great strength with low weight.”

Despite its futuristic appearance, beneath the skin the new car was more Ted Rogers than *Buck Rogers*, with Towns taking the 848cc A-series engine and subframes from a 1961 Mini. He also used that vehicle's automatic gearbox, positioning the gearlever to the right of the driver in order to free up more space between the front seats and improve access to and from that single rear door.

According to Lizzie, the fully functioning prototype took just 11 weeks to design and build. Its creator christened it the ‘Townscar’,



The Minissima custodian, Mike Reed, takes the (funky) wheel



'The interior is a vision of brown nylon, like my parents' sofa circa 1975, while the row of coloured buttons on the control panel is very Space 1999'

DOTTY ABOUT THE MICROCAR

William Towns' follow-up to the Minissima, the electric Microdot, was even more quirky and forward-thinking. Smaller than its forebear, it sat three abreast under a large, glass canopy, with a big removable box at the rear to solve the Minissima's lack of boot space. Pull it out and unfold its handle, and the wheeled box could be used as a shopping trolley.

The Microdot's electric motor might not have been a new idea, but the way the

batteries were recharged was: a tiny Honda petrol generator kept them topped up in a similar way to today's range-extender electric cars.

After giving the Microdot its debut at the 1976 British Motor Show, Towns then collaborated with Mallalieu Engineering in Abingdon to develop the car with a view to putting it into limited production or selling the concept to another firm. The innovative electric motor was replaced with an all-alloy Reliant engine, requiring a bonnet redesign, but rising costs killed the project in the early 1980s.

The sole prototype is still owned by Lizzie Cariss and looked after by Minissima keeper Mike Reed, who hopes to one day get it running – once he has figured out how it works!



Clockwise from left: removable box at rear for luggage; design borrows heavily from the Minissima; Microdot sits three abreast



but this clever pun wasn't to last long. On the eve of the 1973 British Motor Show at Earls Court, BL approached Towns with a view to buying the rights to the car. He recalled: "They came to us and said they had nothing for their show and so could they have this. We said yes, obviously, and as a result got paid great dollops of money – which was very useful bearing in mind we were just setting up."

Discreet BL badges were quickly added to each side of the car's nose and the name was changed to 'Minissima', reinforcing the idea that the model could be a future replacement for the then 14-year-old Mini. In reality, it was simply a sideshow to add some razzmatazz to BL's stand. What the company really wanted the public to take notice of was its new Austin Allegro, which was also making its debut at Earls Court that year.

BL chairman Lord Stokes explained the firm's purchase of the Minissima by saying: "We believe the thinking behind it merits further research." But the motor giant would never take the concept or any of its ideas any further. It was just too radical, plus it wouldn't have passed Vehicle Type Approval because of that door: there was no other means for the occupants to escape in the event of a rear-end collision. After being displayed at various shows around the world over the following two years, it was quietly dropped.

But that wasn't the end of the story. With the rights to the car once again owned by Towns – "That was one of William's better deals," says Lizzie, "because it was agreed with BL that if they hadn't taken the concept any further after two years, ownership would come back to us" – he sold on the design to engineering concern GKN Sankey. One of Towns' Jensen contacts (he had worked on the styling of the Jensen-Healey in the early 1970s) had recently moved to GKN and realised that this could be the perfect car for people with disabilities. Its rear door and flat, boot-less floor made it



Innovative single rear door sparked safety concerns

ideal for wheelchair users, either as drivers or passengers. Safety concerns were addressed by the addition of a side door, and this, plus the toned-down styling, took it a long way from Towns' futuristic imagery – but it worked well. It wasn't until 1981, however, when the design was bought by bicycle maker Elswick and renamed the Envoy, that the Minissima finally entered production. By then it was showing its age and looked expensive: at £10,000, it was £6k

more than a Renault 5. As a result, its short run ended after only around 200 were built.

As for the sole Minissima, BL returned it to Towns, who registered the car and gave it to his wife to use on the road. "I have happy memories of that car," says Lizzie, who racked up 11,000 miles. "It was such a cheery little vehicle."

It was retained by the family after Towns passed away in 1993, then it spent a number of years at the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon before being returned in 2005. It's now cared for by family friend Mike Reed, who is slowly recommissioning it back to its former glory.

Not that it needs much. For an ageing, handbuilt concept car that was once used as a daily driver, it has stood the test of time well. As has Towns' shape. He really was ahead of his time, because it's only now that small monoboxes – such as the Peugeot 1007 – are being mass-produced. This means that the Minissima doesn't look as dated as some of Towns' other designs of the period.

Yet it's obvious from the angular lines whose work it is: look closely and you'll find elements of his Guyson E12 – a rebodied Jaguar E-type from 1975 – and Aston Martin Lagonda.

Climb aboard and it's like entering a tiny motorhome as you step in through that rear door. There's more room than you might think: – I can't stand up, but it's easy enough to slip into the driver's seat. The rear seats are on the tight side, especially for grown adults who will find their feet and knees fighting for space.

The interior is a vision of brown nylon, a bit like my parents' sofa of circa 1975. I love the futuristic control panel on the driver's right, especially the row of coloured buttons that operate the lights and heater – all very *Space 1999*. The strip speedometer isn't – it's from an Austin 1100 – nor is the engine, which starts with a familiar A-series cough.

It's no surprise to find that the Minissima drives like a smaller Mini. The engine is eager and the auto 'box changes cleanly, yet it doesn't encourage you to push much past 30mph, at which point it starts to feel unsettled. The steering is light and precise, but, due to its height, the Minissima rolls more than a Mini so doesn't take corners in the same terrier-down-a-rabbit-hole fashion as its illustrious cousin.

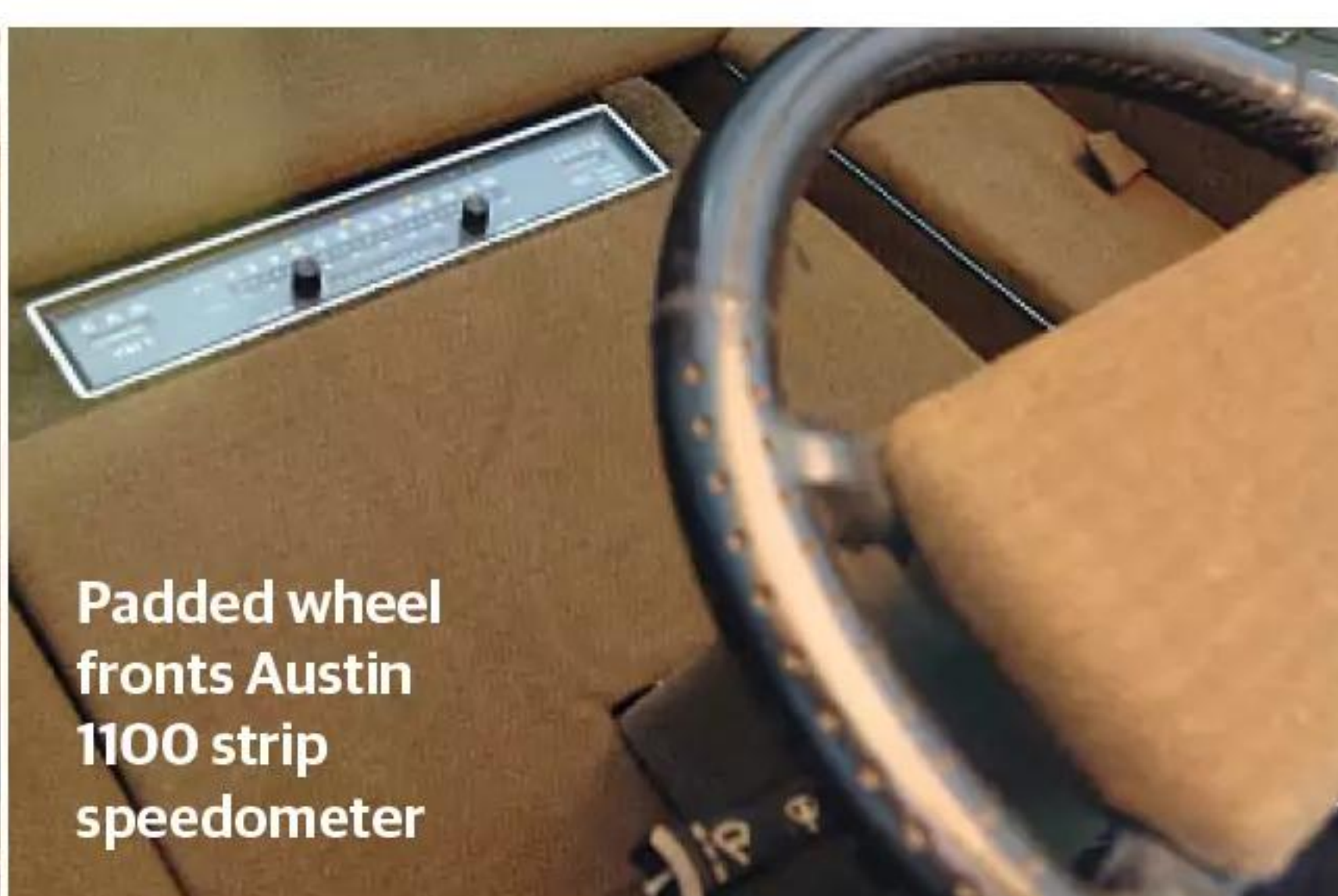
But that's missing the point. Don't forget that this was originally called the 'Townscar', because the city is where Towns envisaged the model spending most of its time. Just check out the turning circle: the Mini's is impressive, but the Minissima's shorter wheelbase makes it astoundingly nimble – it feels as if it pivots about the rear end.

It also offers excellent vision. You sit high, with the huge side windows and slim A-pillars giving an unimpeded 180° view. With no opening windows or ventilation, however, it's not long before you start to bake. No wonder Elswick offered the Envoy with air conditioning as an optional (if costly) extra.

Other than that, this is a brilliant piece of industrial design. Just imagine what could have happened to BL's fortunes had it developed the courage to build the Minissima and other cars like it? And yet, in the same way that it wouldn't be quite as much fun if everyone was related to a 17th-century physicist, the sole Minissima would lose some of its charm if there was one parked on every street corner.



Auto lever and quasi-futuristic control panel



Padded wheel fronts Austin 1100 strip speedometer



Venerable A-series powers the Minissima

TWINS

There was nothing like the sensational Alfasud and Citroën GS when they came out – and there still isn't

WORDS **DAVID EVANS** PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BAKER**



PEAK

While the likes of Ford and General Motors were happy to churn out unadventurous family saloons for the great unwashed in the early '70s, the French and Italians had different ideas. Along remarkably similar lines, as it goes, and within about 12 months of each other. Citroën stole the show with the GS at the Paris Salon in October 1970, then its Milanese rival followed suit on the Alfasud's debut at Turin the following November. Both were compact, front-wheel-drive saloons with overhead-cam flat-four engines that could easily top 90mph on about two-thirds of

the capacity of their cart-like contemporaries. Both had disc brakes all round, inboard at the front. They even looked alike.

Yet for all their similarities on paper, they couldn't feel more different on the road. From the off, the Sud feels like a sports car. You sit low, with the rev counter straight ahead – one of just two main dials, although there are warning lights for water temperature, charging and oil pressure set into the speedo, and the three-spoke wheel adjusts for height. The eager flat-four fires instantly on the key, signalling its intentions with a fruity rasp from the exhaust pipe. It's massively oversquare – 80mm bore by 59mm stroke – and was designed to rev, with a light clutch mated to a slick five-speed gearbox to help you exploit its enthusiasm.

Through an awkward series of twists and switchbacks, its irrepressible character goads you into going faster. The more you push it, the more settled it feels – no understeer, oversteer or torquesteer: just grip, with cheeky spits and pops on the overrun. The light, responsive rack-and-pinion steering doesn't load up and you never feel as if you are close to the limits of the 165/70x13 tyres: it was one of the first mainstream models to be offered with low-profile rubber. *Motor* was impressed, too, in its first road test in September '73, although obviously trying quite hard: 'All this adds up to a car with delightfully neutral handling that impresses also for its tenacious grip and lack of roll. There is also a useful touch of lift-off tuck-in to help tighten the line when



a corner has been taken too fast.' Quite: it feels much like a grown-up Mini, only one with an excellent ride, and it's easily the measure of that other front-drive icon, the Golf GTI.

As you drop into its comfy, high-backed seats, trimmed in a marvellous shade of '70s burnt-orange jersey nylon, the GS feels like an altogether softer proposition. There's a clear view of the elegant Veglia instruments through the trademark single-spoke wheel – larger than the Sud's sporty number and at a flatter angle.

Start up and, after a few intriguing ticks and sucks from the hydropneumatic suspension, it pops up to its normal height. The GS initially feels sluggish after the feisty Sud, until you realise that it wants to be driven like a 2CV: spank it past 4000rpm and the off-beat thrum

gives way to an uncanny smoothness the harder the flat-four revs. You hear the engine working under load, mainly because there's hardly any other noise, but it's never strained. It feels about as quick as the Alfa Romeo, yet it is somehow more relaxed when cruising, perhaps a function of its 2in-bigger wheels, even though it's revving harder at the same speed in top: 4600rpm at 70mph, about 500rpm faster than the Sud. The four-speed floor gearchange – a last-minute concession to conformity – is light if a little vague, although it probably wouldn't be if it had sprouted out of the dash as per the original design.

Okay, in corners it leans more than a party election broadcast – it's a proper Citroën, it's meant to – yet the amazingly compliant set-up

never loses its poise. The more pressure the nitrogen is under inside the suspension spheres, the better it works as a spring. The GS wants to plough on through bends more than the Sud, although it's brought back on line with a little more steering lock: where the Alfa feels sharp and direct, the Citroën is measured and precise, gripping just as tenaciously on its narrower, taller 145x15 tyres.

Both have brilliant brakes: with just 830kg at the kerb for the Alfa plus another 25kg on top of that for the Citroën, and disc brakes all round, neither takes much stopping. The Sud's servoed set-up is nicely progressive and the pedals look ideal for heel-and-toeing, while the powered set-up of the GS is awesome, but not over-sensitive as in most moderns.



CITROËN GS/GSA

Sold/number built 1970-'86/2,439,763

Construction steel monocoque

Engine all-alloy, sohc-per-bank 1015-1299cc flat-four, twin-choke Solex carburettor

Max power 60bhp @ 6500rpm (1220cc)

Max torque 64lb ft @ 3250rpm

Transmission four-speed manual, FWD

Suspension independent, at **front** by double wishbones **rear** trailing arms; interconnected hydropneumatic spheres, self-levelling f/r

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes powered inboard discs

Length 13ft 6¼in (4121mm)

Width 5ft 3¼in (1607mm)

Height 4ft 5in (1651mm)

Wheelbase 8ft 4½in (2553mm)

Weight 1885lb (855kg)

0-60mph 14.9 secs

Top speed 94mph **Mpg** 27-36

Price new £1347 (Club, 1973)

When they were launched, these two cars broke new ground for their makers: one was a radical entry-level model for Alfa Romeo, the other a way for Citroën to plug a gaping hole between its flat-twin ranges and the DS/ID. Each was masterminded by one man. After eight years at Simca in France, brilliant Austrian engineer Rudolf Hruska, whose CV included working on the Tiger tank during WW2 and various Alfa projects post-war, was back in 1967 to design the Alfa from the South (hence its name). The car was to be built in the firm's former aero-engine plant, refurbished with help from the Italian government, at Pomigliano d'Arco in the suburbs of Naples.

Its French alter ego was styled by the pragmatic Robert Opron – the first car under

his sole direction after he had taken over as Citroën's head of design from Flaminio Bertoni. Aerodynamics were key to its efficiency: with a Cd of 0.36, helped by the neat Kamm tail, the original 1015cc GS could cruise at 75mph on 60% of its available 50bhp. It took just two years to get from the drawing board to the production line and was voted Car of the Year in 1971. *CAR* scribe LJK Setright, never one to understate his case, wrote: 'Without surrendering their aristocracy, Citroën has found the common touch, and motoring will never be quite the same again.'

Hruska had boxer engines sussed, from his days before WW2 in Prof Porsche's team developing the people's car. It also made sense for the Sud, because it enabled a low centre of

'Perfect form contained supremely effective function: without any rear-drive gubbins, both cars could seat four in comfort'



ALFA ROMEO ALFASUD

Sold/number built 1972-'83/723,094

Construction steel monocoque

Engine iron-block, alloy-head, sohc-per-bank 1186-1490cc flat-four, single/twin Solex or Weber carburettors

Max power 63bhp @ 6000rpm (1186cc)

Max torque 61lb ft @ 3500rpm

Transmission four/five-speed manual, FWD

Suspension: front independent, by MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar **rear** beam axle, twin Watt linkages, Panhard rod, coil springs, telescopic dampers

Steering rack and pinion

Brakes discs, inboard at front, with servo

Length 12ft 10in (3912mm)

Width 5ft 3in (1600mm)

Height 4ft 6in (1372mm)

Wheelbase 8ft ½in (mm)

Weight 2451lb (830kg)

0-60mph 14.1 secs

Top speed 92mph **Mpg** 27-34

Price new £1399 (1973)

gravity and bonnet line – albeit water-cooled and the right way round compared with the Volkswagen, driving the front wheels. Light construction gave the car a power-to-weight ratio of 76bhp per tonne. And what did Hruska do for suspension? He in effect set the template for the best-handling front-drive cars that followed, with MacPherson struts up front and a beam axle on coil springs at the back, cleverly located by a long Panhard rod, plus two Watt linkages that applied a torsional load as the car leaned, so it didn't need a rear anti-roll bar.

Citroën voted for horizontal opposition, too, with an air-cooled four-pot built using similar methods to its flat-twin – but all-alloy and set low – ahead of the front-axle line, with the gearbox behind it and angled downwards to



From top: UK-spec GS featured set of Veglia dials instead of wacky home-market dash with rotating-drum speedometer; air-cooled boxer thrives on revs



From top: understated Alfa has two main gauges and an adjustable steering column, plus a five-speed 'box on 5M models from 1976; free-revving flat-four has plenty of torque, two bulkheads increased refinement

reduce the centre of gravity. In the GS, its self-levelling hydropneumatic set-up used double wishbones at the front and trailing arms at the back, interconnected front to rear, but fine-tuned with better damping and relocated bump-stops to reduce the pitching and floating that afflicted the bigger DS.

Both Opron and Sud stylist Giorgetto Giugiaro went for the understated look, with little brightwork to interfere with the purity of their two-box shapes – just simple highlights around the windows and to accentuate the shape of the rump in both cases, plus a sill strip on the Alfa. Perfect form contained supremely effective function: without any rear-drive gubbins, both saloons could seat four in comfort while swallowing their luggage in massive boots.

CITROËN GS CLUB LILLEY'S BLOSSOMING



"There is something very addictive about owning Citroëns," says project manager **Shaun Lilley** with a glint in his eye. "When you get rid of one,

it creates a vacuum that you have to fill with another." Over the 12 months before he bought the GS, his second, he'd had 15 Citroëns and he now works for the firm. "My hobby predates my work by many years," he adds. "Until last year, I'd always had a DS, so I sold it with the idea of cutting down my fleet, but I ended up buying this." Shaun's 1976 Club had done just 12,000 miles when he found it at the beginning of 2003. "It was tatty around the arches, needed rear wings and was resprayed by Chevronics," he says. "I got in touch with the previous owner, and about six months later he sent me the spare keys with the leather fob from the supplying dealer, Shaw and Kilburn."

Shaun's fleet currently includes a Bijou, a CX Prestige and a Xantia, but there's still one model that eludes him. "I really want an SM," he says.

ALFASUD 5M WHAT THE BUTLER SAW



Safety engineer **Steve Butler** came upon his 1977 Alfasud 5M by chance. "I used to work with two guys who raved about them," he explains, "but

the rust thing always put me off. I was chatting to the chap who services our Volvo and I mentioned the Alfasud. He said he had one. It was only £500. The best thing is that it's unusual, and it sounds and drives like a proper car."

The Sud only had two previous owners. It had been off the road for several years and had only covered 29,000 miles when Steve bought it. "It had been in a garage," he says, "so it wasn't too far gone. It had rust in the rear wheelarches, the doors and the sills, which were repaired by Mike Spenceley, who also resprayed the car. He's going to do some detail work while it's not being used this winter." Steve's next project is to track down a complete set of panels: so far he has found a couple of doors and an offside front wing, but no bootlid as yet.

CITROËN CHECKS

- 1 Flat undertray hides rust traps. Check it, plus inner wings, rear subframe, floorpans – fronts are costliest due to their spot-welded double skin that isn't protected internally. Sills rot from the inside out
- 2 Air-cooled engines are strong, but run hot and need oil changes every 3000 miles: listen for noisy camshafts – irregular oil changes can cause these to wear rapidly. A little smoke from cold is normal, but it should soon clear
- 3 Ensure that cambelts have been changed recently, or have them done if you're unsure of their age
- 4 An engine-out clutch swap takes eight hours. Worn driveshaft CV joints clonk while accelerating on full lock
- 5 Hydropneumatic suspension is reliable, but check pipes: replacements ideally copper or Teflon-coated. Don't be put off by a bouncy ride: new spheres are cheap

Thanks to *Chevronics* (chevronics.co.uk)

ALFASUD CHECKS

- 1 Check for rot, particularly front panel, inner wings and where they meet the bulkhead, doors, sills, rear wheelarches around damper mounts and boot floor. Many panels are now unavailable
- 2 Door hinges are weak, so they can fit badly or sag: look out for damage around the aperture
- 3 Vinyl seats in Supers can crack along the mouldings and tear along stitching, while cloth-covered sports seats wear quickly and good replacements are scarce
- 4 Engines are strong, but look out for blue smoke and listen for knocking under acceleration on high-mileage cars. Check that Alfa Romeo oil filters have been used: the crank can wear if not
- 5 Transaxle 'boxes are robust, but can be noisy: it should stop with the clutch down – if not, trouble is imminent. Drive on full lock, listening for clicking worn UJs

Thanks to *MGS Coachworks*



Neither has a high load sill to contend with, although the Citroën had the edge because its bootlid took the bumper with it and opened to floor level, while the spare wheel lived under the bonnet. Moreover, both came as cavernous estates – although the baby breadvan-style, three-door Alfasud Giardinetta was never sold in the UK. Giugiaro also styled the pretty Sprint coupé that outlived the saloon by five years.

Attempting to keep up with the times had mixed results: both cars gained power – up to a frisky 105bhp on Webers in the 1490cc Alfa Green Cloverleaf and a torquier 65bhp 1299cc for the Citroën – and eventually hatchbacks, losing their low sills in the process. It was at the expense of their looks, the purity of which disappeared under bigger impact bumpers,

wheelarch trims and rubbing strips. Yet they were still ahead of the game for refinement when they were replaced by the 33 and BX.

Sadly, the Sud never matched its technical promise with commercial success: at 723,000 saloons all-in, production was barely half the projected output, thanks to a combination of lax quality control, high unit cost and poor industrial relations. But with a total of nearly 2.5 million, including the facelifted GSA, the GS was second only to the Deux Chevaux – although much of the good work was undone by the costly, rotary-engined Birotor debacle.

Driving these two landmark designs back to back, and watching them head home amid today's amorphous blobs, you realise just how advanced they were. Save rot protection, the

lack of which did for the Alfa virtually off the production line (extensive use of reclaimed steel didn't help) and the Citroën not long after, its Formula One-style flat undertray hiding rust-traps. That aside, all small saloons have done over the intervening years is to grow bigger, heavier and uglier. Given a deft, colour-coded nip and tuck here and there, this groundbreaking duo would still look fresh. If you could combine the Sud's handling with the Citroën's supple ride and composure, there would be nothing to touch it. Lightweight cars on skinny tyres: it's the way forward.

Thanks to Steve Butler, Shaun Lilley, Alfa Romeo Owners' Club UK (03301 330558; aroc-uk.com); Citroën Car Club (citroencarclub.org.uk)



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